AGRICULTURAL TRADES UNIONISM IN SHROPSHIRE
1900 - 1930

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Abstract - Agricultural Trades Unionism in Shropshire 1900 - 1930.

This thesis traces the growth and distribution of agricultural trades unionism in Shropshire and evaluates and explains developments using four key variables. After a discussion of the sources used and a description of union development involving the National Union of Agricultural Workers (NUAW) and Workers' Union (WU), four chapters measure the relative importance of the variables which guide the whole study. These are the role of the local and national leaderships, the wider labour movement, the Shropshire agrarian economy and the domination of a conservative cultural ideology.

It is found that leaderships were moderately important. It is shown that the relative strength of the NUAW village activists accounts for the longevity of that union compared to the rival WU, and that while the personal interest of national leaders in the county strengthened unionism, their inability to compromise led to destructive competition.

It is shown that the wider labour movement, although existing in Shropshire, was of little importance to agricultural trades unionism, aside from a fruitful relationship between the NUAW and organised railwaymen. It is also shown that although variations in types of farming were of importance in explaining the overall level of trades unionism, no direct correlation can be established between union strength in particular districts and the complex structure of the Shropshire agrarian economy.

However this study demonstrates that the cultural factors behind the dominant conservative ideology were paramount in explaining the overall weakness of trades unionism. They include such elements as the survival of gentry and farmer paternalism, whose ancient loyalties were reinforced by new post war village institutions, and the weakness of alternative nonconformist and socialist ideologies. This meant that the prevailing loyalty for Shropshire farmworkers was to a ' local patriotism ' rather than to broader class based systems. This, it is believed, has possible important implications for future comparative research.

Nicholas Mansfield July 1997.

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Preface

This thesis should perhaps be subtitled ' In Search of Alf Stubbs '. In the summer of 1945 my father, in common with millions of other conscripts was counting the days to his demobilisation when his unit received orders to embark for garrison duty overseas. When the military authorities ignored his protests, he turned to his M.P. Alf Stubbs, who had recently been returned as Labour member for Cambridgeshire at his sixth attempt, seemingly solved my father's problem, though the story that questions were asked in Parliament may be apocryphal. Because of this act of thwarting the establishment and his role as a long serving town councillor, Stubbs was a folk figure of my childhood, but his full time job was as an organiser for the farmworkers' union.

So whilst this thesis was registered in 1994, its gestation period stretches back five decades. Its geographical vistas have changed from the back streets of Cambridge, through the broad skies of the Fens and Norfolk, the South Wales Valleys and post - industrial Manchester to the green rounded hills of its Shropshire location. Its potential subjects have ranged from early nineteenth - century rioters, obscure radical shoemakers, Owenite philanthropists, patronised Edwardian college servants, Norfolk ' teamsmen ' and Great War veterans.

Those five decades have seen the rise (and possible decline) of labour history, the flowering of the oral history and History Workshop movements and a more mature approach to material culture and landscape studies, all of which have influenced this thesis. Talking, in the course of my job, to older working - class people about what they did for a living and how they managed the rest of their lives, has made me wary of the over generalisations common to some historians. My work has also trained me to make history accessible to ordinary people. So more recent academic developments such as social anthropology, womens' studies, cultural histories and all sorts of ' post modern discourses ' have not provided a central methodology to this study. The re - emergence of big narrative histories, whilst emphasising perhaps the insignificance of my chosen field, at least shows that a study of the past can be entertaining. If anything, this thesis is a social history of the institutions with which a group of early twentieth - century working men tried to change their lives. That they did not entirely succeed and are mostly forgotten, does not alter the **heroism** of their actions, and seen in the longer term, from 1945 or 1997, their influence may be more lasting than we realise.

A large number of people have helped along the way to search for Alf Stubbs. These include ; Jane Bevan, Peter Carter, Jim Davies, Fred Duffield, Noel Edwards, the late George Ewart Evans, the late Sam Fairweather, Angela Gaffney, the late John Gorman,

John Foster, Ruth and the late Eddie Frow, Angela John, Bill Jones, the late Reg Holmes, David Howell, Alun Howkins, Alex King, John Lenten, Mike Petty, Iori Prothero, Denis Pye, David Pretty, Barrie Trinder, Dennis Walters and Bridget Yates.

Staff at the following archives and libraries allowed access to their records and often kindly suggested other sources. My inability to thank them all by name owes more to the continuing shyness of their profession, than to the lack of a warm welcome ; the Cambridgeshire Collection (Chris Jakes), the Co - operative Union Library, Manchester (Gill Lonergan and the late Roy Garratt), the Clwyd Record Office, the John Rylands Library, Manchester (Gareth Griffiths), the Herefordshire Record Office, Kidderminister Library, the Institute of Agricultural History, Reading University (John Creasey and Roy Brigden), the Modern Records Centre, Warwick University (Richard Storey and Christine Woodland), the Norfolk Record Office, the Norfolk Rural Life Museum (Martin Collier and Frances Collinson), the Staffordshire Record Office, the Shropshire Museums Service (Nigel Nixon) the Shropshire Records and Research Centre (particular thanks to Tony Carr and colleagues) and the National Museum of Labour History. I am very grateful to Stephen Bird and Andy Flinn at the latter institution and indeed to all my colleagues at the museum for their understanding and forebearance over the last few years. This extends to the museum trustees, especially Jack Jones, Michael Foot and company secretary Eddie Cass who have given me every encouragement.

The Transport and General Workers' Union has been very supportive and allowed me access to their archives. Thanks are due to the following members and officials, past and present, for their help over the years ; Arthur Amis, George Barnard, Jack Boddy, Ray Collins, Arnold Ecclestone, Barry Leathwood, Ivan Monckton, Wilf Page, Bill Roberts, Reagan Scott and Howard Wright.

Thanks are due to members of staff at the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Wolverhampton. Some ideas were presented at seminars at the University and at Llafur study days where helpful criticisms were made. I am grateful to Malcolm Wanklyn for making available an advance copy of his paper **Border Agriculture and Agrarian Society** and for his co - supervision of the study. This thesis would not have been possible without the firm support and friendly guidance of my supervisor John Benson, who has offered thoughtful advice at every step and who helped me jump, sometimes reluctantly, through the many hoops along the way.

Above all an enormous debt is owed to my family, who gave me the most precious commodity - time. To all of them my love and thanks. Campaign medals should be awarded

to Julia Mansfield, for help beyond the call of duty in the trench warfare of typing, proof reading and coming to grips with information technology, Walter Mansfield, whose shrewdness in negotiating the rate of pay for his post GCSE task of helping to prepare the maps must surely rival that of Jack Beard or Billy Fielding, and to Fred and Ena Mansfield from whom I learned to value Alf Stubbs.

Note on the names of organisations used in this study

For the sake of convenience, the trade union founded in Norfolk in 1906, from which the present day union traces its direct descent, is referred to throughout this thesis as the NUAW (National Union of Agricultural Workers). This union was founded as the Eastern Counties Agricultural Labourers' and Small Holders' Union, and retained that title until 1910. Despite its regional remit, in its personnel and centralising tendency it was the direct heir to Joseph Arch's National Agricultural Labourers' Union (NALU). In 1910 it took on a national role and became the National Agricultural Labourers' and Rural Workers' Union. This was simplified to the National Union of Agricultural Workers in 1920, and the ' Allied ' suffix added in 1968. The union joined the descendants of its old rivals in the Transport and General Workers (TGWU) in 1981, and now forms the Rural, Agricultural and Allied Workers Trade Group.
The Workers' Union was formed in 1898 and joined the TGWU in 1929.
The National Union of Railwaymen is referred to as the NUR throughout this study, despite being known as the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants until 1913.
The radical ex - servicemens' organisation, which existed in Shropshire between 1917 and 1920 is referred to as the NFDDSS or the Federation. The complex and confusing history of this body is discussed on page 126.

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Chapter 1 - Sources

Introduction

This thesis will trace the growth and distribution of agricultural trades unionism in Shropshire between 1900 and 1930. The local pattern of rural unionisation within the county will be evaluated and explained using key variables. These comprise the role of the national leaders of the main agricultural trades unions, the work of local activists and the impact within the county of the wider labour movement and national events. Consideration will be given to the structure of the Shropshire agrarian economy and the effects of different types of farming. The weakness of alternative ideological systems for farmworkers will be compared with the deep rooted tenacity of local patriotism. This will be demonstrated by providing evidence of the survival of gentry and farmer paternalism and the creation of new village institutions.

Part One of this chapter will review the secondary sources available to the thesis, and Part Two will review the primary sources. Unfortunately there are no books or articles directly about the farmworkers' unions, or the labour movement in Shropshire. Those sources which cover the subject indirectly, or from a national or general perspective, are covered under the following four headings which are used throughout this study :

1. The local and national leaderships within farmworkers' unions.
2. The wider rural labour movement.
3. The structure of the Shropshire agrarian economy and the place of the farmworker.
4. The culture of rural Shropshire, Methodism and ' local patriotism '.

Part One - Secondary sources

1. Secondary sources on the local and national leaderships within farmworkers' unions

Farmworkers have been reasonably well served, perhaps as well as most other groups of workers, by the general efforts of historians and sociologists. However regional or local accounts are less common, as are those with detailed explanations of the working and cultural lives of farmworkers. Although many trade union histories have been written by authors from outside the union, this is especially so in the case of farmworkers. This is often accompanied by a slightly condescending tone, even from the most sympathetic writers and fellow trade unionists. It is well illustrated by historians' treatment of the Dorset labourers who attempted to form a union in 1834, and by the evolution of the very term ' Tolpuddle

Martyrs '. **1.** Some of the earliest accounts of the attempts of farmworkers to organise came out of the campaigns themselves, and the rural trade unions of the 1870 s were largely documented by Liberal journalists who sought to influence or participate in the events they depicted. Their farmworkers were to be electoral fodder to challenge the Conservative hegemony of rural politics. The classic case of this is the sending to Warwickshire, by the liberal **Daily News,** of their famous correspondent Archibald Forbes, fresh from the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 - 1. Forbes reported the events as ' The Revolt of the Field ', in the same style as his later eye witness dispatches from far flung imperial campaigns. **2.** Even accounts from within the union are not by the labourers who were the backbone of the organisation and share the assumption that the workers were being acted upon, rather than acting themselves. Whilst sharing in the ' Heroic march ' approach common to much traditional labour history, they assume that the farmworkers are somewhere at the back of the column. **3.**

This tone even affected Joseph Arch himself, as the first farmworker to write an account of the union movement he had led. His autobiography **The Story of his Life** (1898), is the first in a series of self - justifying memoirs which came out of the union. From a perspective of semi-retirement after his defeat as a Liberal M.P., it presented a partial, querulous and often bitter picture, from an old man who felt unrewarded by his Liberal grandee friends and deserted by his ' own class '. George Edwards, the farmworkers' leader of the next generation, recorded Arch's view in 1895 : ' never trust our class again . . . . I have given all the best years of my life in their interest, and now in my old age they have foresaken me ' . Hasbach in his revised work of 1908, was the first to point out the blatant inconsistencies in Arch's **Life**. His avowed opposition to emigration, ' I wanted to keep it in the background, as a last resort ' (p.380), sits badly with his (exaggerated) boast to have helped 700,000 to go abroad. Emigration becomes literally the cornerpiece of the union's case in the membership emblems of the National Agricultural Labourers' Union, which have a vignette of members taking ship for the colonies, in the bottom right hand corner. (The centrepiece is, of course, Arch preaching beneath the chestnut tree on Wellesbourne village green) . His claim that : ' the Sick Benefit society was pulling the Union to the ground, I have always been against it ', ignores the fact that Arch proposed its introduction. Arch was the supreme showman and self - publicist and without his drive and dedication, agricultural trade unionism would not have taken off in the 1870s. The problem is that later historians, like Pamela Horn, in recognising his importance, have taken the book at face value. **4.**

Hasbach's book, **A History of the English Agricultural Labourer**, published in German in 1894, was translated into English in 1908, and reprinted, with a preface by Sidney Webb in 1920, under the auspices of the L.S.E. Although he covered an extraordinarily long period

(from pre - Conquest England!) in a section on the development of the agricultural proleteriat, the real value is in its sociological survey of Victorian farmworkers, including hours, pay, conditions of work, and local variations. It is the first systematic account of agricultural trades unionism from the 1870s to 1908, based mainly on government sources, which are listed in an extensive bibliography. We may question the accuracy of some of his details for example (p. 359), he confuses the new Eastern Counties Union (which went on to become the NUAW), with the old Norfolk and Norwich Labour League of the early 1890s, but it is an impressive achievement from a foreign academic. Indeed many of his statements have been repeated by later historians with no attempt at verification. His view of the Strange's **West of England Union**' : ' was that : ' In less than a year the union . . . had collected 30,000 members in half a dozen counties. Its watchword was. . . ' Emigration, migration but not strikes ', is repeated almost word for word by every subsequent authority, as late as Marsh and Ryan in 1984. **5.** Hasbach's explanation of the smallholding movement, and its relationship with the unions, has never been bettered. He presents still useful insights into the competition between town and country unskilled labourers (p. 301), the extension of the franchise to include farmworkers (p. 303), and the rivalry between National and Federal unions in the 1870s. He did not exaggerate the influence of nonconformity, which has rather obsessed some later writers. He presented the same problems; scattered workplaces, lack of solidarity and meagre benefits, which still bedevil organising rural workers, one hundred years after his writing.

Two other books on union leaderships appeared at the highpoint of phenomenal union growth from 1917 to 1920. These works are similar in many ways, and were again written by middle - class sympathisers working within the campaigns they were describing. **Village Trade Unions in Two Centuries** by Ernest Selley was published in the heady post - war days of November 1919. For Selley (p. 85) : ' the regeneration of village life began with the unions. They stirred the labourer and gave him a new outlook and new ideas and put spirit in him '. He provides the first account of the pre - 1914 growth of both the WU and the NUAW, and includes valuable information, which because of the paucity of archive sources of these unions, is not available elsewhere. This includes statistics on wages and union membership, which are not now extant and may indeed have been destroyed by the unions dismayed at their post 1920 decline. This makes the book useful for tracing the growth and distribution of the unions in localities in a general way, although Shropshire material, as one might expect in such a brief survey, is not highlighted. Whilst rightly viewing the formation of the Agricultural Wages Board as an important opportunity for union growth, Selley failed to foresee its drawbacks. He was sadly too optimistic about the long - term strength of the unions in 1919 (p. 163) : ' If this rate of progress is maintained for another year, the farmworker will be one of the most closely organised wage earners in the United Kingdom.'

The author of the second book had been actively involved in the pre-war debate on the state of the English countryside. F.E.Green's **The Awakening of England** (1913) was a popular clarion call for radical Liberals who sought the break up of landed estates. Green was typical of those Liberals who went over to Labour ; he campaigned for the unions, and stood as Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Chichester in November 1918. His book, **The English Agricultural Labourer 1879 - 1920**, was published in the latter year. Green is particularly good on the pre-war land reform movement (the ' Red ' vans), and gives a lively description of the war period, with some material specific to Shropshire. He outlines the story of how the WU insinuated itself onto the Agricultural Wages Board, a point later repeated by Howard Newby, although Green only hints at the conflict between the unions. As a participant he gives what is still the most complete account of the development of the Labour Party in the countryside during this period and of its relationship with the farmworkers' unions, and was the first to highlight the role of railwaymen in the growth of the rural labour movement. Some of this is based on interviews he had with organisers of both unions, many of which are reproduced verbatim, including one with William Fielding of the Shropshire NUAW. The book remains a key source for the growth and distribution of the unions in most areas of England and has been quoted extensively by later historians ranging from Groves to Newby. **6.**

It seems likely that Joseph Arch's autobiography was at least partly ' ghosted ' by one of his Liberal jounalist friends, but the life story of George Edwards is undoubtedly his own work. **From Crowscaring to Westminster** was published in 1922, shortly after Edwards became M.P. for South Norfolk. Edwards was a remarkable figure, re-founding the union at the age of 56 in 1906, and having the singlemindedness and courage to keep it going. A sympathetic character, he seems to have managed to retain personal loyalty, even from his political enemies on the left and right. In many ways the book is a classic nineteenth century working - class autobiography of the religious type. Edwards, from his old age, traces a moral path from a poverty - striken childhood, through conversion to Primitive Methodism, and struggle for literacy, to a successful marriage. For much of the book his trade unionism is secondary to his religious life. The lists of improving books read, or sermons given, frustrate the reader seeking information on his views on politics or the union. **7.** Like Arch he was a little vain, and justifies his actions, like the quarrel with the Liberal grandees who dominated the union executive in 1911, and his pro - war stance in 1915, which led him into recruiting women landworkers, and securing secret wage settlements with the Earl of Leicester. Despite this, the plain prose, coupled with the stirring story, give it a power even today. Although its account of the growth of the union is almost all concerned with Norfolk, this is compensated by its inside view of the union leadership.

Howkins argues that writing the book kept the union together in 1922, as Edwards, having just written about his past struggles, led the fight against his erstwhile ally, Peel's new Landworkers' Union. **8.** Certainly the book had a strong influence within the union and was reprinted in a cheap edition by the NUAW in 1956. When conducting an oral history programme in Norfolk in the early 1980s, it was found that every activist's home had a copy which was reverently brought down when his name was mentioned. Sadly, the book has nothing on Shropshire, although he organised there, and ends in 1922, thereby missing the crucial 1923 strike.

The years 1925 - 1945 were unfruitful ones for the farmworkers' union, and this is reflected in the shortage of literature produced during the period. The election of the first majority Labour government seems to have been a spur to labour history generally and the post war period produced the book which dominates the historiography of the union ; Reg Groves **Sharpen the Sickle! - The History of the Farm Workers' Union** (1949). It is no accident that the book appeared at the point when NUAW membership was at its zenith. Edwin Gooch, the NUAW President, who dominated its counsels from the 1920s to the 1960s, became Labour Party chairman. The NUAW was now well established within the British trade union movement, with Gooch's politics suiting its ' cold war ' stance. The farmworkers, who already occupied an important role in the myths of the labour movement through the Tolpuddle Martyrs, deserved a union history, and the book was published in a cheap members' edition.

The choice of Reg Groves as author was an unlikely one. He had been in the Communist Party, and was associated with, and later became the historian of the Balham Group, the first British Trotskyists. Between 1938 and 1959, Groves had the thankless task of contesting a number of southern rural seats for Labour, and came near to success in Buckinghamshire in 1945. An experienced journalist, he advertised for material and accounts from members in the union's journal, **The Landworker,** for several years, and the work benefits from this approach which almost pre - dates ' oral history '. The great strength is its wide coverage of the union's history, in a thrilling narrative sweep through Captain Swing, Tolpuddle, Arch, Edwards and the 1923 Strike, as well as what the author wisely calls ' The Lean Years ', all in 250 pages. Although it does repeat material from Green and Selley, the object of celebrating and informing members of their history is achieved and the book is much more entertaining than most union histories. Groves' Trotskyism and Gooch's Executive's view seem to coincide in a heroic ' March of Labour ' approach and in common with many union histories, there is little analysis of problems like Arch's difficulties, the splits with the Federal unions, and those workers who did not join the union. In the twentieth century, the rivalry with the WU is underplayed : ' Its efforts were not directly competitive with the Norfolk union, and even

after this union became a national union, the WU grew for the most part in areas where little or no organising was going on.' (p.128).

Despite limitations and eccentricities (the illustrations for example, look as if they were put together with whatever was to hand at the last minute in **The Landworker** office, with the 1870s and the 1913 Lancashire strike predominating), the book is still, after nearly half a century, the starting place for the historian of the growth and distribution of the union, and has something pertinent to say about every county where it operated. Significantly **Sharpen the Sickle** was reprinted in 1981, at the time of the NUAW joining the TGWU.

The post Second World War period also saw a growth in ' countryside books '. A few of these make reference to the unions, the best being Josiah Sage **The Memoirs of Josiah Sage** (1951). This is a lively combatative story from a Norfolk activist in both Arch's and Edwards' unions, whose character shows through despite his being marketed as a country writer. Indeed its concern for local issues, and the local impact of national events makes it important evidence for later historians like Howkins. It is a rare survival from the grassroots union leadership, enhanced by drawings from Paxton Chadwick, an artist who was a prominent member of the rural Communist Party in East Anglia. Sadly nothing similar exists for Shropshire. **9.**

It took some time for the new labour history, which developed in the 1960s, to become interested in farmworkers. Initially this interest was restricted to the early nineteenth century, with books like A. J. Peacock's **Bread or Blood** (1965) on the 1816 East Anglian revolt, or E. J. Hobsbawm and George Rude's **Captain Swing** (1969). The latter in particular, with its detailed account of the ' Last Rising ' of 1831 - 2, also provided a brilliant analysis and methodology which inspired a generation of rural social historians. Economic historian J.P.D.Dunbabin published pioneering articles on the growth and distribution of Arch's union. Otherwise the only new work on the unions was Rex Russell's early WEA class source book, **The Revolt of the Field in Lincolnshire** (1956). The latter was published in a cheap edition by the NUAW, whose Lincolnshire membership was second only to Norfolk's, but the union was selective on what view of its history it would support. Thus its erstwhile Ruskin student Michael Madden's B.Litt. thesis, finished for the union's fiftieth anniversary celebrations remains unpublished. Its useful corrective to Groves' work, particularly on the issue of national leaderships, failed to find favour with the NUAW, but its findings have been skilfully used by Newby. Similarly another ex - Ruskin student, Alf Peacock, had his work on Arch's union in East Anglia published initially under the auspices of the Communist Party. **10.**

Pamela Horn's Ph.D. on Arch's union in the Midlands was completed in 1968, and in the next two decades she has produced a number of articles on the nineteenth century union, and on rural life before 1920 in general. Her biography, **Joseph Arch - (1826 - 1919) The Farm Workers' Leader** was published in 1971. Horn's work is essentially descriptive rather than analytical, but her considerable output has had the effect of stressing the overriding importance of the NALU and Arch himself in the unions of the 1870s. Howkins, perhaps unfairly, criticises what he calls her ' Whiggish ' insistence on the importance of centralised unions in the tradition of the Webbs. **11.** A series of later local studies, referred to below, goes some way to elevate the role of the Federal unions of the late Victorian period.

Other modern historians have generally written from the socialist viewpoint common in many unions. Richard Hyman's **The Workers' Union** (1971), although written in what might now be considered an orthodox ' official ' style, is a carefully crafted book, composed almost as an act of homage to the author's father who was an organiser for the WU. A product of the Warwick industrial relations school, it covers the shifting story of the various groups of workers, geographically and by trades, who were organised under the WU banner. As such, it gives an account of the growth and distribution of WU membership, in which Shropshire figures prominently, because of the local interest of union president John Beard. Whilst its strength is the broad overview, it misunderstands the position of the rural worker, a failing of the WU itself. Perhaps because of the very complexity of its subject, the book concentrates more on the union's national leadership than is currently fashionable amongst labour histories. It does recognise the conflict between the two unions, but tends unconsciously to side with the WU in its conclusions, particularly in its relationship with the NUAW. However, Hyman's remains the only detailed secondary source for the WU, which as the apparent loser in the contest, and regarded with suspicion by many in the labour movement, has otherwise been written out of history.

Howard Newby's **The Deferential Worker : A Study of Farmworkers in East Anglia** was essentially sociological, based on extensive field work in Suffolk in the early 1970s. The chapter on the history of agricultural trades unionism is an irreverent antidote to the heroic approach to the subject. Coming from a different discipline, his willingness to face the harsh realities of the subject is refreshing and his analysis is brutally honest and often rings true. However his work is deeply pessimistic about agricultural trades unionism, which makes some of his conclusions suspect if viewed from a long historical viewpoint. So his insistence on the failure of the union if judged by urban standards, may be countered by the view that any rural organisation is remarkable in itself. Some of his conclusions about the NUAW/WU conflict, especially about their structures and the role of national leaderships, will be questioned in the light of Shropshire evidence. Newby's ' deferential ' subjects may also be

the particular product of their place and time. Suffolk, after the 1874 lock-out, was never a very strong union county, and was the scene of NUAW/WU conflict, and the early 1970s were an unhappy time for the union, as mechanisation started to bite, membership tumbled, and long serving organisers were made redundant. A different result would have been obtained in say Lincolnshire in the early ' 50s, or even Norfolk in the early ' 80s.

Alun Howkins' **Poor Labouring Men - Rural Radicalism in Norfolk 1870 - 1923** (1985) is the finest book of its generation on the unions. Using oral history and field work, the author, a founder of History Workshop, has recorded for posterity the testimony of a forgotten generation who formed a rural radical majority in Nofolk in the early twentieth century. It is particularly strong on the farming year (the author, as another Ruskin educated ex-farmworker, knows what farmworkers actually did for a living), and how the ' structural conflict ' which this created was reflected in wage bargaining and the character and tactics of the union itself. Howkins' single chapter on the chapel culture says more than Nigel Scotland's entire book on Methodism. However Howkins is inclined to be slightly romantic in his socialist narrative, and has been criticised by Alan Armstrong for exaggerating the level of class conflict that existed in the countryside. Whilst his argument about the importance to farmworkers of the ' local world ' , is undoubtedly convincing , one hopes that his championing of the effectiveness of the ' federal ' unions in Norfolk would be challenged by his chosen ' centralist ' opponent. Instead Pamela Horn genteely ignores his work, curiously not even acknowledging it in her later books. **12.** Whilst Howkins has an extraordinarily sympathetic feel for his chosen geographical area, because of the NUAW's prominence in the county, its comparative use for work on Shropshire is limited. Unfortunately, the book also ends after the great strike of 1923, and the reader longs for a continuation to encompass the 1940s when the union was at the height of its powers in Norfolk, and dominated local and Parliamentary elections.

If Howkins' work may be considered optimistic, David Pretty **The Revolt That Failed : Farm Workers' Trade Unions in Wales 1889 - 1950** (1988), is firmly pessimistic. It is a dense and thorough account of the growth and distribution of the unions in Wales, which is good too on the labour allies of the farmworkers, which included miners as well as railwaymen. (The desire to keep up wages in the south Wales coalfield, in the face of rural immigrants may have been their motivation). In a country of mainly small family farms, the ' living in' system lingered longer and Welsh farmers and their employees shared a nonconformist outlook. Pretty shows how these factors made it difficult for the unions to flourish, apart from in the two arable corn growing areas of Anglesey (which produced its own Welsh speaking union, linked to the quarrymen, until it joined the WU), and the Vale of Glamorgan, which

with its many English immigrants often working on farms before finding their way to the pits, was organised by the NUAW from 1914. Even here, county membership had plummeted to only ten by 1925, confirming the accuracy of Pretty's bleak picture for the unions in Wales. It provides some useful comparative material for Shropshire, in particular confirming the union allegiances in neighbouring Welsh counties (NUAW in Radnorshire and the WU in Montgomery), but a discussion of the tensions between English and Welsh rural cultures on the borderland, which would have been very interesting, is beyond the scope of the book.

Nigel Scotland's work on the unions and methodism (see pp.16 - 17), has been mainly about East Anglia. He has tackled a new geographical area in his **Agricultural Trades Unionism in Gloucestershire 1872 - 1950** (1991). He shares with Pretty the weakness of maintaining an account over such a long time period and the book is more informative on the 1870s. His interest, some would say his obsession, with nonconformity shows through. Nonetheless he does identify that the strength of certain branches, particularly of the WU, in small towns like Stroud, was linked to the remnants of the local textile industry. Despite evidence that the NUAW and WU were in conflict nationally, Scotland ignores these events in the post war period (they did not seem to happen in Gloucestershire), and concludes : ' The two unions continued to enjoy a cordial relationship within the county and worked in harness to secure the best available terms for their members.' (p.113). This limits its comparative use for counties like Shropshire. Scotland also ignores work by Howkins in references and even booklists, as if writing from a socialist point of view were unacceptable.

Alistair Mutch's **Rural Life in South - West Lancashire 1840 - 1914** (1988) is based on his Ph.D. thesis. It contains an analysis of farming near to a city and in the chapter on workers, considers how this influenced wages. He generally follows Newby's critical view of the ' centralised ' NUAW in the important 1913 Ormskirk strike, but has pursued original work on the role of John Phipps' breakaway union, the Farm and Dairy Workers.

Partly because few researchers are now working in Britain on the unions, there has been a recent paucity of academic literature on farmworkers. One recent contribution by economic historians Boyer and Halton examines whether the unions of the 1870s had an effect on farmworkers' wages, and concludes that in the short term they had a large effect, and that this was maintained to an extent over a longer term. **13.** In contrast, local studies of agricultural trades unionism over the last few years, perhaps because they deal almost entirely with the pre - 1914 period, continue the optimistic ' heroic march ' approach, where the union is seen as the liberator of the downtrodden and ill paid farm hand.

The best of the local studies is Arthur Brown's **Meagre Harvest - The Essex Farmworkers' Struggle Against Poverty 1750 - 1914** which was published by the County Record Office in 1990. This is a well detailed account by a veteran Marxist historian, who has a wide local knowledge. Frustratingly, the author makes little reference to other works, and seems to be modestly suggesting that his conclusions have no place in the ongoing debate. Brown, though, does have some interesting things to say on Arch's union, particularly in the post 1874 period, when the Essexmen seem to have achieved higher wages than in other parts of East Anglia. In contrast to Nigel Scotland, he concludes that nonconformity was not an important factor in the county ; most branches met in pubs, even in the 1870s. He alone of all historians, provides a useful list of factors likely to create a strong local branch, although his suggestion that these ' protected living standards', may well be wishful thinking. He also locates continuities, finding union activists who had been Chartists and identifying links between 1872 and 1914. Unhappily, the brief introduction from 1750 is not matched by a conclusion of the post 1914 period.

On the 1870s two biographies have appeared. Helen Allinson's **Alfred Simmons - Friend of the Farmworker**, covers the ' Federal ' union in Kent, and John R.Milburn and Keith Jarrott's **The Aylesbury Agitator** traces the life of Edward Richardson, a Buckinghamshire activist. Material on Richardson's career as an emigration agent for the Queensland government, is important evidence for Peacock's view that migration rather than Methodism was the driving force behind the 1870s unions.

Another useful recent study of a local dispute is Roy Brazier's **The Empty Fields; the Agricultural Strike of 1914** (1989). Although not an academic historian, he gives a lively picture of the almost syndicalist strikes on the Essex/Suffolk/Cambridgeshire border in the early summer of 1914. He is particularly good on the interest of the national press drawn to a ' silly season ' story and the involvement of socialist celebrities, the neamess of London accounting for both. This was mainly a militant NUAW dispute, with the WU being reluctantly drawn in, neatly inverting one of Newby's conclusions. Tantalisingly, the outbreak of war, and the release of those imprisoned into the army, saves the author from an explanation beyond his area of immediate expertise.

The post World War Two period is barely covered by union historians, who seem more interested in the origins of union activity than the later period when, in places like Norfolk, the rural labour movement had a substantial impact on local govemment and parliamentary constituencies. This situation has been partially addressed by a new official history. Bob Wynn's **Skilled at All Trades : The history of the farmworkers' union 1947 - 1984** (1993), continues the optimistic ' heroic march ' approach in a detailed, but rambling way.

2. Secondary sources on the wider rural labour movement

There is no literature directly about the rural labour movement, apart from that on farmworkers' unions, where historians like Green and Howkins are concerned to give a political context to their work, and nothing at all on the labour movement in Shropshire. Although the countryside was widely debated as in the 1920s, until recently Labour Party histories made no mention of the issue. Ross McKibbin **The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910 - 1924** (1974), provided the first discussion of the issues, centring on the Ludlow bye - election of 1923, which influenced the Labour Party's rural thinking. McKibbin's organisational approach has been followed by Chris Howard in an article on the growth of post 1918 Labour parties, which contains valuable material on rural areas in East Anglia, the east Midlands and Yorkshire, especially, and unconvincingly, on how the Independent Labour Party attempted to win the farming vote. These writers, perhaps unfairly, echo the early Labour Party's own view that the countryside was a problem, albeit one which ' had to be solved ' if there was to be a majority Labour government. They also fail to give an account of the distribution of support for socialism in rural areas. **14.**

Alun Howkins' article on the 1911 Norfolk split in the NUAW, is an important rural contribution to the ' new liberalism' / rise of Labour debate, although John Howe's more general piece in **Midland History**, covering the same period, is more useful as a comparison with Shropshire, than as a local example which contributes to a national analysis. The lack of interest in the countryside in labour historiography is illustrated by the absence of farmworkers from standard modern accounts such as David Howell **British Workers and the Independent Labour Party 1888 - 1906** (1983). To an extent this has been improved by Duncan Tanner's painstaking volume on working class electoral composition in the early twentieth century, which skilfully synthethises existing contributions to the debate. **15.**

The histories of those trade unions, other than farmworkers', which had members in the country districts, like blacksmiths, local government officers, shopworkers and even the heavily unionised postmen, likewise make scant mention of their rural activities.The best are on the railwaymen, and even here the ' Celtic fringe ', in the shape of the work of Raymond Williams and Emmet O'Connor, which has produced lasting insights into the ways in which the railways helped produce the rural labour movement and the development of the fraternal relationship between the railwaymen and farmworker. **16.** In Shropshire, only Barrie Trinder has written anything on trades unionism in the industrial areas of the county, and even this is on the nineteenth century. The absence of Shropshire coalfield unions in the twentieth century is confirmed by the **Victoria County History**, by Gregory's M.A. thesis, and by

various local studies. The Shropshire Miners' Association must be almost the only mineworkers' union without a history. **17.**

Friendly societies have attracted some attention in the last few years, although they badly need a good basic national history besides the ageing Gosden and a book on the rural societies is particularly lacking. Several works on the ' respectability' and ' labour aristocracy' debates make reference to urban friendly societies and within the surviving societies there has been an upsurge of interest in their origins and their material culture. Lincolnshire is particularly well provided for with a chapter in James Obelkevich's book and an extended pamphlet from veteran historian Rex Russell who puts the societies into a long trend of protest, which included Captain Swing and the 1870s unions. A new county study, David Neave **Mutual Aid in the Victorian Countryside : Friendly Societies in the Rural East Riding 1830 - 1914** (1991) has somewhat transformed the subject, but the chapter in Alun Howkins' Ph.D., which is not published in his **Poor Labouring Men**, is still important. The latter demonstrates how skills learned in the societies were transferred to the unions, and takes the story into the important post war period, when state provision undermined the insurance role of friendly societies, and modern entertainments undermined the cultural role. Nothing has been written on Shropshire friendly societies despite the availablity of archive sources and many references in the local press. **18.**

The same can also be said about the co-operative movement, where the waves of accounts of local societies, nearly always linked to anniversaries, have altogether bypassed the county. Standard national histories of co - operation have been of some use, especially Saunders, Sargeant and Peers who mention the important Shrewsbury society. **19.** The largely forgotten subject of the radical ex - service organisations of the Great War deserves better treatment, although they are mentioned as an adjunct to several studies. David Englander has explored state surveillance and a major book from him on ex- servicemen, has been expected for several years. Howkins mentions the effect of ex - servicemen on agricultural trades unionism in Norfolk, and this theme has been pursued by Mansfield particularly in relation to the war memorial movement in the countryside. Angela Gaffney's 1996 Ph.D. thesis explores the latter theme in Wales. **20.**

3. Secondary sources on the structure of the Shropshire agrarian economy, and the place of the farmworker

The Shropshire landscape has been the subject of several books, mostly historical geographies, which deal with the subject as part of a broad sweep with the whole of ' the Marches' as background. Their weakness for this study is that they tend to concentrate on the

Middle Ages and early modern period, and seldom address similar regional themes in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They also have a ' travelogue ' role examining the undoubted scenic beauty, stunning ancient architecture and rural quaintness of this part of the world, rather than how people earned their living on the land. A few sources cover land use and land holdings of the more modern period, from an archaeological or geological perspective, and one makes special reference to soil types. Works such as D.R.Mills **Lord and Peasant in Nineteenth Century Britain** (1980) have been used to provide a framework for the debate on the structure of land holdings. **21.**

Agricultural history, now established as a sub - discipline with two or three journals, serves Shropshire, as a whole, as well as most counties, but does not have the coverage in depth of the more agriculturally progressive counties like Norfolk. Nonetheless works such as Vol. IV of the **Victoria County History**, and Stamper's book, **The Farmer Feeds Us All**, derived from it, provide a workmanlike agricultural background to the subject. Some contemporary evidence is provided by Rider Haggard's famous survey of 1903, which drew evidence from farmers in particularly in the south - west of the county. Malcolm Wanklyn's new study puts Victorian and Edwardian agriculture into the context of the Welsh border region, an approach which gives valuable insights into Shropshire. Rural Shropshire is not as well provided for with farming memoirs, but Arthur Hollins' book provides insights into the relationship between a paternalistic, eccentric but progressive tenant farmer and his workforce. Nothing exists written by a farmworker comparable to memoirs produced in other counties ; works like Tinsley are inadequate for this purpose, but inevitably many popular local history publications also have references to agriculture which cumulatively can be useful. **22.**

The representation of farmworkers in English literature, as stereotypes, has a long history, stretching from Chaucer to Thomas Hardy. Sometimes this has been specific to Shropshire, as with William Langland's verse, George Farquhar's play **The Recruiting Officer**, or in the novels of Mary Webb. Usually bucolic or comic figures, farmworkers were victims, rather than particapants in their own destiny. In the nineteenth century this was joined by a more sensitive thread whose purpose was to proclaim the essential purity of country living compared to crowded and unnatural city life. Whilst this included more realistic depictions of working class life, farmworkers were stereotyped as worthy, timeless but powerless, in touch with their roots in the uncertainties of the modern world. **23.** (This latter view has affected historians of farmworkers, possibly to this day). Politically sympathetic Victorian theorecticians, ranging from Karl Marx, in Volume One of **Das Kapital** (1867), to Thorold Rogers in **Six Centuries of Work and Labour** (1878) saw labour merely as part of an economic equation which their work would help solve. Edwardian historians, famously the Hammonds, writing on the early nineteenth century, saw farmworkers as heroic, but sadly

doomed to failure at the hands of forces beyond their control. This view was shared even by Hasbach's **History of the English Agricultural Labourer** (1894/1908) and by the more campaigning work of F.E. Green. Vestiges of this tradition can be found in the work of Marxist historians of the twentieth century, like Edward Thompson, and Eric Hobsbawm who, whilst rediscovering a new rebellious rural poor, still saw them as victims of the class system intensified by the Industrial Revolution and all its changes. **24.**

It has been left to a more analytical school to attempt an explanation of the lives of twentieth century farmworkers. As has been discussed, Howard Newby's sociological account **The Deferential Worker**, brings an honest, sharp and often convincing view of the subject, although his later work **Country Life** is less successful. Several recent ' textbooks ' have contrasting opinions of farmworkers and their unions. Alan Armstrong's useful survey is an ambitious book, which inevitably, given such a wide time scale, is better in some parts than others. It summarises the findings of economic agrarian historians and historical geographers, and combines this with a variety of the farmworkers' own concerns - diet, housing, welfare institutions, leisure, technological change and the role of women. It has a basically gloomy view of farmworkers' attempts to improve their condition, and their powerlesness. Armstrong is generally pessimistic about the impact of unions (although he points out, p.125, that Arch's union was the largest of its day) He is sceptical about the effect of unions on wages even during the period of the Agricultural Wages Boards, and feels that ' the flight from the land ' was a more significant factor. The twentieth - century section, based on government data is fairly dry and is better treated in Alun Howkins' survey **Reshaping Rural England : A Social History 1850 - 1925** (1991), which gives a fuller picture in a more limited timescale. Howkins has a better ' feel ' for the variations of English landscape and agriculture, and the place of farmworkers within these. His thesis postulates a change from a ' local ' preoccupation to a national consciousness. The trade unions he describes are related to the state of local farming, and he adds a more cultural flavour to his analysis with the inclusion of deferential rural organisations like the Primrose Leagues and friendly societies. Howkins considers that the growing importance of the relationship between the town and countryside, covered in issues such as the growth of suburbs, ruralistic artistic communities and the countryside as recreation, were also crucial in this shift from local to national concerns. **25.**

Although dealing mostly with earlier periods, Keith Snell's work presents some long term trends in the employment impact of capitalistic agriculture, including the Poor Law, in an original and influential way. Similarly Neeson's book on Commoners, although primarily on the eighteenth century, has useful material on cottagers and the strength of their ideology,

which has been useful for understanding the longevity of their viewpoint in the wild places of Shropshire. **26.** The latter is a useful antidote to pessimistic works which stress the ' powerlessness ' of farmworkers. An example of this trend is political scientist Renee Danziger's curious and slight **Political Powerlessness Agricultural Workers in post war England** (1988). Largely about the failure of 1970s Labour governments to do anything about tied cottages, or the chemical T - 245, it shows an incredible ignorance of the rich political traditions of the farmworkers' union, particualry in the 1940s and 50s, and even the basic electoral background of the ' 74 - ' 79 government. The material is used as a filler for a theoretical construct.

4. Secondary sources on the culture of rural Shropshire, Methodism and local patriotism

Rural cultural histories started with Victorian folklorists, but the major wave of cultural studies of farmworkers did not appear until the 1950s, and grew out of the oral history movement. Historians like George Ewart Evans meticulously attempted to rediscover the vanishing occupational and cultural milieu of the last generation of labouring life before mechanisation, largely using farmworkers' own words, and provided a superb methodology for a rural social history, which alas cannot now be repeated in detail. Curiously for a Communist Party member, Evans was not interested in union history, although his last book had a portrait of the threshing engine crews, who contained a high proportion of blacklisted men. Instead he had a bigger theme - that a system of agriculture dating from the Iron Age came abruptly to an end with mechanisation . Although his overstating of this case (through concepts like ' horse power and magic ') embarrassed many of his admirers, his influence on later historians has been immense. Thus writers like Samuel, Carter, Obelkevich and Howkins have convincingly recreated the cultural ' local worlds ' of their subjects. What is remarkable is that practically all these works look at the nineteenth century, or at the outside, stop at the ' Eden ' of pre - 1914. Raphael Samuel's **Village Life and Labour** (1976) is typical of the work of a new wave of ' people's history ', which coalesced around the History Workshop movement. A collaborative effort with four pieces on rural history, its style, oral technique and concern for womens' history, influenced those following after. Obelkivich's Lincolnshire study is a thoughful analysis of the way that religion and class interacted in a rural area, and Ian Carter's work on Aberdeenshire is a dense, almost anthropological examination of the ' non deferential ' labourer's life, particularly under the ' bothy ' system. More prolific, but less influential are the works of Pamela Horn. However as Alun Howkins has pointed out in a review of **The Cambridge Social History of Britain** the lack of rural social history in those volumes may indicate the general lack of current interest for the subject. **27.**

Sadly, none of this school of cultural historians has worked in Shropshire, although C.S. Bourne's **Shropshire Folklore** (1883) provides a solid account of traditional customs. Some modern cultural historians have reinterpreted Victorian folklore to provide evidence for rural conflict ; see for example Bob Bushaway's **By Rite : Custom, Ceremony and Community in England 1700 - 1880** (1982), which does include some references to Shropshire. There are no secondary sources on popular protest in Shropshire in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and nothing exists on say poaching (despite evidence from newspapers that it was widespread until the 1930s). The exception is the work of Barrie Trinder which, although mainly confined to an earler period, and to the Ironbridge area, has provided background information and valuable parallels. **28.** A popular national account of poaching, which is good on the early 20th.century, is Harry Hopkins' **The Long Affray - The Poaching Wars in Britain** (1985).

A whole mass of local historical publications and guide books, some popular rather than academic, have also been examined. Whilst of varied quality, these sources do produce a strong sense of Shropshire identity which will need to be analysed further to obtain the postulated ' local patriotism '. However the theoretical framework of the rural social anthropologist school, represented by Cohen, has been investigated and rejected, since it is concerned with very local, usually village microcosms. **29.**

Two local studies are worth discussing because of their labour movement connections. John Beard's **My Shropshire Days on Common Ways** (1945) are the memoirs of a young man from Ellerdine Heath in north Shropshire who became an Alderman on Birmingham City Council and President of the Workers' Union. Unfortunately, the book is tantalising in its omissions and one learns more about Beard's early organising work in Shropshire from Green's works. Even Beard's religious and cultural life as a Wesleyan methodist is sketchy. Aside from indentifying the author as a **Clarion** reader, the book degenerates into the sort of travelogue/local history, which could well have been serialised in the **Shrewsbury Chronicle**. Ida Gandy's **An Idler on the Shropshire Border** (1970) is a charming account of her life as a G.P.'s wife in the 1930s. She includes fine descriptions of the remoteness of border farming and of the cultural differences between the Welsh and English which are not usually referred to in print. Although she is not afraid to discuss the class differences between farmers and their workforce, she does not mention her husband's political opinions - he had been chairman of a local Labour Party branch. Given that her part of the county had strong union support, her silence on the rural labour movement is frustrating.

Shropshire literary sources, though not as rich as say Hardy on Dorset, can boast Mary Webb and Malcolm Saville. After decades of being unfashionable, Webb's six novels have

now been re - published by the feminist press. Her contemporary novels like **Gone To Earth** (1917) give sharp insights into the rural class structure and the relationship between Shropshire and Wales. Webb is also the subject of a workmanlike biography, Gladys Mary Coles **Mary Webb** (1990), which describes how the Shropshire countryside became a place of pilgrimage for her many admirers, after her early death. Raymond Williams' autobiographical novel **Border Country** (1960), set in the General Strike, explores the same cultural theme through the eyes of the author's Welsh, socialist signalman father, who equates England with the class enemy. More gentle are the Lone Pine childrens' adventures of Malcolm Saville, which although published from the 1950s refer to an earlier rural idyll in the borderlands of south - west Shropshire. **30.**

The argument that the British labour movement owes more to Methodism than Marx has a modern champion in the work of Nigel Scotland in the area of the cultural importance of nonconformity. His work, **Methodism and the Revolt of the Field** (1981), is a one argument book, taking 200 pages to say that most of the leaders of Arch's union were Methodists. Although based on thorough research in East Anglia, the author does not explore any other possible influences on the union's growth. Alf Peacock's work on the role of colonial governments, which paid the salaries of union officials, whilst getting them to act as emigration agents is completely ignored. Scotland's subsequent account of the unions in Gloucestershire fails to weigh the importance of non - religious explanations, an approach which becomes ludicrous for the twentieth century. Other more balanced approaches to ' chapel culture ' are found in Obelkivich and Howkins .

Also useful, particularly on the smaller sects is John Hibbs **The Country Chapel** (1988). Dennis Mills, as part of his ambitious analysis of ' open ' and ' closed ' villages, argues that the former were more likely to give rise to nonconformity. The existence of a published **Royal Commission Historic Monuments** report on Shropshire chapels has made easier the task of testing Mills' thesis on the geographical spread of nonconformity. John Gay's national survey on the historical geography of religion has some Shropshire material and William E. Morris provides a standard history of local Methodism. **31.** Howard Burrows' Ph.D. thesis, whilst covering the whole of the ' lowland marches ', is centred on Shropshire. Whilst finding nonconformist strength in the Ironbridge Gorge and other industrial areas, Burrows does not neglect the countryside, though he does point out that here the tacit gentry support or acquiescence was needed for Methodism to thrive.

Not surprisingly, given the national shortage of material on the subject, there are no Shropshire secondary sources on popular conservatism. The **Victoria County History** gives some basic political facts ; some information relating to militarism is unwittingly given in local

military histories and Martin Pugh's work has underpinned much of the discussion. However the sense of ' Shropshire patriotism ', and particularly how this relates to ' Welshness ' will be argued using other sources. **32.**

It can be generally concluded that the secondary sources for this study are adequate for the task. Whilst there are no sources directly about the farmworkers unions in Shropshire during this period, the existence of a general literature about farmworkers, their trade unions and the local and national leaderships within them, gives a background and structure to the thesis. Whilst sparse and under - researched, there is a growing body of literature about the wider labour movement and an interest in the rural issue in books about the early twentieth century labour movement. The agricultural economy of Shropshire is reasonably well covered, given its importance as the county's most important industry, and for over a hundred years there has been a large body of work covering the lives of farmworkers. Whilst more diffused there is a usable literature covering the cultural life of Shropshire and general cultural histories of working class rural life.

Part Two - Primary sources.

Introduction

This section will review the primary sources available to the thesis. Because there are virtually no surviving archives from any part of the labour movement in Shropshire during this period, the historian must use records of indirect relevance, either extrapolating from national records, which themselves are incomplete, or from surviving records of the state and employers associations. Non - manuscript sources, newspapers, annual reports, trade directories and material culture, must be used to help fill the gap. In addition, when the passage of time has also made a systematic oral history programme difficult, it can be argued that the the shortage of sources does not warrant any study at all. However, the interest in history from below over the last thirty years, in particular related to women's studies and ethnic history, has taught that indirect sources can show other ways forward. The same four headings outlined in the discussion of secondary sources will be used to discuss primary sources :

1. The local and national leaderships within farmworkers' unions.
2. The wider rural labour movement.
3. The structure of the Shropshire agrarian economy and the place of the farmworker.
4. The culture of rural Shropshire, Methodism and ' local patriotism '.

1. Primary sources on the local and national leaderships within farmworkers' unions

Researching farmworkers' history is like panning for gold rather than hewing a rich seam. Given the spread out work force, the patchy incidence of trade union organisation, the high turnover of membership, the dependence on the commitment of a minority of activists, and the poor housing and living conditions of most farmworkers, very few manuscripts sources survive. Even in a comparatively strong union county like Norfolk, which boasted over 300 branches in its heyday, the records of only three NUAW branches are deposited in public collections. The only surviving minute book of the Norfolk and Norwich Amalgamated Labourers' Union of the 1890's, was collected accidently by George Ewart Evans, the oral historian in the 1950's. However all the minutes had been torn out, and the empty pages filled with ' horsemen's recipes ', a clear indication of the owner's view that posterity would be unlikely to be interested in the contents. From the WU, nationally only **one** branch minute book has been traced, and this from Rugby, Warwickshire. With the help of the TGWU the author has located the records of one Shropshire branch of the NUAW, but these are still used by the Norton branch secretary, and only start in 1959. **33.**

Recent historians of the unions in Wales, Essex and Gloucestershire have encountered exactly the same problem. A search has been made in neighbouring counties to Shropshire. Some material, but all post 1945, is located at the Staffordshire Record Office, and Herefordshire has a deposit from Sydney Box, the long serving WU activist. Surprisingly this consists of minutes from Hereford branches of other unions, and not the WU. The Welsh side of the border suffers from the same paucity, David Pretty found nothing in Powys, despite Montgomery being considered a stronghold of the WU. **34.**

Organised Shropshire farmworkers in this period were either in the Workers' Union (WU), or the National Union of Agricultural Workers (NUAW), and full use has been made of their national records. Local organisers of the NUAW were expected to give full reports on their activities to their national Executive Committee, and these, together with the minutes of the national Organising and Political sub-committee, surviving published **Annual Reports** and early membership lists, mean that the growth and distribution of the union in Shropshire can be traced in the union's central records at the Institute of Agricultural History. The Institute also has interesting press cuttings books, which record all the strikes taking place nationally in 1923, and an incomplete run of the union's journal **The Landworker** (1921 - 1930), and files relating to its predecessor **The Labourer** (1915 - 1918). The national records of the WU, though more patchy, contain enough material in the **Annual Reports** and **The Record**, the union magazine, to map the growth, decline and amalgamation with the TGWU in the

county. The TGWU national records have files on the amalgamation negotiations of 1929, which also included the NUAW. Lastly, the TUC archives, also at the Modern Records Centre, Warwick, have been used to trace the dispute between the NUAW and the WU and the General Council's attempted mediations from 1918 until 1928.

Given the passage of time, oral history, which has proved so fruitful for other labour historians, and which has been used in other projects by the writer, has not proved a key source for events and explanations between 1900 and 1930 in Shropshire. Nonetheless, with the help of the TGWU, five interviews of retired members and officials have taken place which gave the study a local background on the union, and on Shropshire farming, and which confirmed certain conclusions, e.g. the persistence of the ' mixed branches ', pioneered by the WU.

It is, however, the use of the local press as an important primary source that makes this study feasible. A systematic survey of the major county weekly newspaper, the **Shrewsbury Chronicle** from 1900 - 1930, has produced a mass of material on the NUAW and the WU. (This has been used to map the growth and distribution of agricultural trade union branches of the county.) This has been supplemented by a partial survey of the **Wellington Journal**, a paper with a county coverage, but with an emphasis on the eastern coalfield, for the crucial period 1916 to 1923. Other local papers have been sampled to ensure a geographic spread throughout the county, and for important developments of national or local importance. These include the **Whitchurch Herald** (for the WU's 1899 north Shropshire campaign), the **Ludlow Advertiser** (for the 1923 Ludlow bye - election), and the **Border Times** and **Kidderminster Times** (for coverage of the extreme north - west and south - east edges of the county for the key dates of 1916 - 17, 1918 - 19, and 1923). The earlier county weekly, **Eddowe's Salopian Journal**, has been studied for the 1870s, and whilst it has produced a great quantity of material on the West of England Union between 1871 - 74, the next twenty five years appear to be barren of labour movement activity in Shropshire, to judge from a sampling of the same newspaper until the end of the century.

Both the county newspapers, and the local papers with a smaller distribution, have an overwhelming concern for the affairs of rural life. They contribute a picture of an isolated county, where the needs of the farming community predominated, with a minute coverage of markets, produce prices, agricultural techniques, weather reports and country sports. The **Journal** of the 1870s, in particular, seems an anachronism, which was having difficulty coming to terms with the modern industrial Britain creeping over the eastern horizon of the county. The full reporting of the **West of England Union** seems to derive from the sustenance its leaders were drawing from liberal urban radicals. The **Journal** saw agricultural trades unionism as disaffection spread by ' Birmingham ' radicals, like Jesse

agricultural trades unionism as disaffection spread by ' Birmingham ' radicals, like Jesse Collings and Joseph Chamberlain, who knew nothing about farming, and were seeking to pervert the labourers' political allegiances by false promises and extending the franchise. The paper therefore was concerned to alert its readers. In the twentieth century this view that unionism was imported by ' foreigners ' was continued by the **Chronicle**. Both newspapers were advowedly Tory, the **Chronicle** owned by Sir Beville Stanier, the Conservative M.P. for North Shropshire and then Ludlow until his death in 1923. However not until the Great War, with its massive changes and increasing state intervention, were national and international politics covered in any detail. The **Chronicle** loyally supported the war effort and then the Lloyd George coalition, followed by the Conservatives again, except that, surprisingly in the 1920s, it published features sympathetic to the British Fascists. This may be due to the leanings of a particular editor, but it has proved difficult to investigate this when all local journalism was published without a by line.

The main problem with using local newspapers is the random nature of items appearing. Nonetheless the NUAW and the WU meetings appeared consistently from 1914, enabling the growth and distribution of both unions to be interpreted. One minor problem is that reporters and sub editors confused the names of the two unions, perhaps regarding both as outside agitators between which there was little to choose, or genuinely assuming they were one and the same, as it would seem illogical for any trade union to compete for such unpromising material. It has usually been possible to distinguish between the two through the reporting of the names of the union officials. As real living standards improved in the post war period there were more varied local press features on popular music, cinema, broadcasting, cycling and tourism, reflecting the world outside Shropshire. Although no figures are available, features on gardening and allotments for example, may indicate that towards the end of the period larger numbers of farmworkers were included in the **Chronicle'** s readership. This may explain the short lived NUAW column which appeared in the paper in 1925. **36.**

Original use has also been made of the material culture of the unions such as photographs, banners and membership emblems, located at various union offices, archives and museums. It is accepted that such evidence is by its nature unsystematic, depending on the accident of survival and inclusion in a public collection. However it has revealed evidence of previously unknown union branches, such as the membership emblem filled in for a Roddington member, located at the TGWU's Newtown office, and surviving regalia, such as the Shropshire NUAW county banner at the National Museum of Labour History, can tell us about the pride and financial stability of the union. **37.**

2. Primary sources on the wider rural labour movement

Even in the more industrialised areas of the county, the coalfield and county town, labour records are as scarce as those of the farmworkers, with nothing from the Shropshire Miners' Association or the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation, the Shrewsbury Trades Council records being destroyed in the 1970s; and the only survival from the Labour Party is an incomplete photocopied run of the Wrekin Constituency Labour Party Minutes from 1931 - 36. **38.** The only extant Shropshire trade union archives are those of the North Wales Miners' Association, held by the Clwyd Record Office. These include **Annual Reports** and Executive Committee minutes plus papers from the Brynkinallt Lodge. This pit straddled the Denbighshire - Shropshire border, and men from St. Martins, in Shropshire, worked there. Although geographically marginal, and away from the main thrust of Shropshire labour history, the lodge produced Tom Morris, the Oswestry CLP candidate in the 1918 and 1924 elections, and first Labour Shropshire county councillor. Although Morris was a firm supporter of the NUAW, the lodge concerns were mainly local and industrial. Whilst an active labour movement existed in the north - west corner of the county, it can be suggested from the lack of surviving sources that in the eastern coalfield area it was comparatively weak, and explains the difficulty that the Labour party had in taking the clearly winnable Wrekin constituency during this period. This is borne out by the survey of the local press where even the activities of the Shropshire Miners' Association, are less fully reported than those of the NUAW and WU. **39.**

The national archives of the labour movement such as the Labour Party, Co-operative Union, National Union of Railwaymen (NUR) and Trades Union Congress have been used in a similar way to the national records of the farmworkers' union to produce evidence of the growth and distribution of the labour movement in Shropshire. The Labour Party archives are held by the Labour History Archive and Study Centre, at the National Museum of Labour History in Manchester (NMLH). Material used includes the files from the Advisory Committee on Rural Problems 1919 - 20, and **Annual Conference Reports** from 1900 to 1930. Although these have little information directly about Shropshire, they and periodicals like **Labour Magazine**, **Labour Organiser**, **New Leader** and **The Daily Herald**, discuss the issue of Labour's rural support at length. The two latter periodicals also have extensive reports on the 1923 Ludlow bye - election. Other socialist magazines like **The Clarion** carry reports of the yearly ' meets ' which often took place in Shrewsbury, and were usually ignored by the local press. Otherwise, Shropshire seems too remote and of too limited socialist potential for it to be worth mentioning. The NMLH also contains the archive of the Communist Party of Great Britain, but this has nothing from Shropshire, even the CP rural paper **The Country Standard** only started in 1936.

Again the local press covers the small early socialist movement, based mainly in Shrewsbury, along with organisations like the Land Restoration League, suffrage groups, and

Again the local press covers the small early socialist movement, based mainly in Shrewsbury, along with organisations like the Land Restoration League, suffrage groups, and the Workers' Educational Association, but almost always from a hostile viewpoint. The formation and progress of constituency parties are reported and although locally the Labour party had no wartime pacificist past to live down, the press drew on national issues to give a consistently anti - Labour line. Despite this, Labour's progress in council and Parliamentary elections are covered, together with social activities like smoking concerts, lectures and May Day processions. The Co - operative Union Library, also in Manchester, contains the Co - operative Congress **Annual Reports**, which have been helpful in reconstructing co - operative history in the county. Statistics, including dates of foundation and structure of local societies, numbers of members, premises and assets are available from 1869 for the whole period, from which it has been possible to chart the growth and distribution of the movement in the county. Whilst names of society officials are absent, it has sometimes been possible to trace these from trade directories. The **Shrewsbury Chronicle** again reported on the meetings and social side of co - operation, including an active concert party.

The TUC archives, at the Modern Records Centre of Warwick University have been used, particularly those covering the sometimes troubled relationship of the WU with other trade unions. The TUC **Annual Reports** publish debates on the same subject, and on rural questions, and have basic statistics on membership and addresses of officials. The growing strength of Shrewsbury as a light industrial town and union centre, is indicated in local newspaper reports on craft, public service and white collar as well as industrial and general unions. This is particularly so with railway trades unionism. The main through passenger and industrial routes meant that the NUR had a major presence in Shrewsbury, the Oswestry area, the eastern coalfield, the market towns, and the countryside. It was the railwaymen in the latter locations, invariably ex - farmworkers escaping to better themselves, that seem to have been particularly despised by the farmers. This may be why the campaigning industrial / political alliance between the NUAW and NUR was reported in the **Shrewsbury Chronicle.** The **Annual Reports** of the NUR, consulted at the NMLH, contain meticulous information about the location and size of branches and the names and addresses of secretaries, plus records of annual conferences, which often discussed rural affairs.

The other participant in the Shropshire labour movement from 1916 to 1920 was the radical ex - service organisation, the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Soldiers and Sailors (NFDDSS). Here, the absence of any records both locally and nationally causes the local press to be the only source for its activities. The war was reported in detail by the **Shrewsbury Chronicle** and along with pieces on local regiments and support for the civilian war effort, there are also stories about the difficulties of recruiting, military tribunals,

absentees and deserters which illustrate the ambivalent attitude of many working people. The NFDDS was covered extensively, as part of the general coverage of the war, including the specific demands of the organisation, initially against ' comb outs ' , and then on demobilisation, pensions and employment. The temporary alliance with the labour movement (in which the WU played an important role), and the bitter class hatred towards the farmers who mainly stayed at home, and the officer (and Conservative) dominated Comrades of the Great War, get widespread coverage between the Armistice and the formation of the British Legion.

An index of 260 Shropshire activists has been built up using information from all primary sources. This shows a degree of overlap of individuals between the farmworkers' unions, the railwaymen and other trade unionists, co -operators, socialists and ex - servicemen, indicating the creation of a Shropshire labour movement in a short timescale.

3. Primary sources on the Shropshire agrarian economy, and the place of the farmworker.

The records of the Shropshire National Farmers' Union, the main employers' organisation, formed in 1908, are available in the Shropshire Record Office. Though incomplete, they cover the whole county with a reasonable chronological spread, and include the Shropshire NFU minutes 1910 - 22, and then from 1928 onwards, two copies of a monthly branch magazine for January 1920 and February 1923 and a useful chart showing membership and acreage in 1919. They give an account of how farmworkers' employers came to organise, and of how farmers came to terms with the increasing role of the state, and (briefly) collective bargaining. During 1917 to 1921, the period of the Agricultural Wages Board, although NFU meetings were reported in the local press, the NFU minutes give a fuller picture of internal debates and even the tactics that their representatives adopted. They illustrate the way that the NFU, having at first refused to talk to trade unions, made an accommodation with the WU in preference to the ' socialists ' of the NUAW. Unfortunately, the Shropshire Agricultural Wages Board records have not survived, and have to be reconstructed from incomplete press reports.

The extant records of the Shropshire War Agricultural Committee from September 1915 to October 1919 demonstrate in some detail the changes in agriculture wrought by the war ; massive state intervention, ' ploughing up ' campaigns, mechanisation, and shortages of labour causing a return to children and women working. The Labour Sub - Committee set up to solve the latter problem has surviving minutes, and these, inadvertently, trace the emergence of agricultural trades unionism. They contain the only account of the NUAW's

wage offensive of 1917, which resulted in harvest strikes right down the Severn valley in east Shropshire, and which because of other wartime news, was not reported in the local press. Other important issues are mentioned like the ' poaching ' of farm labour by government contractors, and the thorny questions of the conscription of farmers' sons and demobilisation of ' starred ' men. The Lydbury North parish collection at the Shropshire Record Office (see 4 below) contains records from local charities, which illuminates the agricultural economy and the place of the rural poor, usually retired farmworkers, at a very local level.

The county and local newspapers discussed above contain an extensive coverage of agriculture, including weekly farming columns which report the county's premier industry in great detail, and display more interest in the outside world, and the role of national government. The local press highlights the concerns of farmers, landowners and all the other trades and professions who depended on the Shropshire agrarian economy for their livelihood. The exceptions were the concerns of the farmworkers, save perhaps for a brief period between 1916 and 1920 when economic circumstances and trade unions gave them the upper hand.

A survey has been made of the ' principal seats in Shropshire ' from **Kelly's Directories** of 1900 and 1929, the two dates marking the beginning and end of the study. In conjunction with the local press, this has helped to ascertain whether the Shropshire gentry and aristocracy shared in the widespread national decline. The information has been mapped, and compared with the geographical spead of agricultural trades unionism, to discover possible connections between union branches and the landed estates. Another project has been to examine demographic change in four of the clusters of villages (e.g. on the sandstone plain north of Shrewsbury) where the NUAW was strong. A brief population survey using Kelly's **Directory** has been undertaken from 1890 to 1930, with a parallel survey in two clusters of villages where agricultural trades unionism is absent. **40.** Oral history, as discussed elsewhere, whilst not the main source of material for this study, has provided a solid background of Shropshire farming since 1900. The Shropshire Museums Service collection of around one hundred transcribed tapes, has been the main source, together with the Shropshire Womens' Institute's study **Shropshire Within Living Memory,** plus personal interviews with retired farmers.

4. Primary sources on the culture of rural Shropshire, Methodism and local patriotism

The primary sources for cultural material for this study are, of necessity, often indirect and diffused. A case study has been made to examine a theory of a ' local patriotism' , linked to a distinct Shropshire county view, and the survival of gentry paternalism. The strong sense of

Shropshire indentity found during this period, was perhaps intensified by its closeness to a contrasting Welsh culture, with a foreign language and a significant nonconformity and a vibrant west Midlands radical urban culture, with wider industrial and national concerns.

Rider Haggard in his classic study **Rural England** (1902) reported at length on the village of Lydbury North in the south west of the county. The extant parish records of Lydbury North are strong on the church, education, charities and local societies. In addition, and perhaps coincidently, Lydbury was a classic estate village, with two local landowners and had an active NUAW branch which led the wartime Shropshire wage offensive with a strike in 1916. Lydbury also possesses the minute book of a Foresters' lodge, and the only extant records of a Shropshire Conservative Association in the period, thus making it an almost perfect test case for the survival of paternalism and ' Shropshire patriotism '. Fortunately the records of Edgton Primitive Methodist chapel, dating from 1834, located in the neighbouring village to Lydbury, are also a rare surviving source for a grass roots view of local nonconformity. **41.** The hypothesis of the longevity of gentry paternalism has been further examined, by using the fairly extensive surviving Shropshire friendly society records, from both affiliated and local societies, to establish if their connections with landed society were more important than their role as independent working class organisations. **42.**

The local press again is proving an excellent source of information for the religious and cultural life of the county. Every issue of the **Shropshire Chronicle** during this period assumes a great pride in the county and its achievements. This was honed during the Great War, when the intrusion of a larger national and world stage seemed to give the county establishment a larger part to play. Although the local press in other parts of the country gave full support for voluntary military enlistment and the successes of local regiments, in Shropshire, this was clearly linked to the scenic beauty of the county and the historic military tradition as the bulwark against the Welsh. **43.**

In the post war period the local press saw Shropshire as a beacon of normality in a world of industrial strife and revolution beyond its understanding. Although it could not go back entirely to its pre - war preoccupation with rural concerns it reported , perhaps unconsciously, the process of reconstruction with a number of new village institutions - the British Legion, Womens' Institutes, village halls, and Young Farmers clubs, and new festivals - Empire Day, ploughing matches and Armistice Day. This process has been assessed to ascertain how it affected existing rural culture and if it reinforced paternalism and the sense of ' local patriotism '. The post 1918 Lydbury North collections are also being used for this purpose. Again the Shropshire Museums Service oral history collection has been used as a source for rural culture. These cover paternalism, the value of education, inter - village rivalries, the role

of field sports, and ' local patriotism ' in war and peace time. Two publications based on community oral history projects have also proved a valuable primary source. These are Pentabus **Bucknell Talking** (1982), and the previously mentioned **Shropshire Within Living Memory** (1992).The latter in particular gives some voice to rural women's cultural concerns, although sadly the original material for this survey has been lost. Original use has also being made of collections of material culture in Shropshire museums, where these illustrate ' local patriotism ' ; examples are the National Trust collection of election ceramics and the farming collections at the Acton Scott Working Farm Museum.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that whilst the shortage of archive sources, particularly on the unions themselves, has been a problem in reseaching this thesis, this is a universal difficulty for all historians of farmworkers. Previous studies in this area of labour history have demonstrated that the indirect use of other sources can be profitable. The passage of time has also made oral history a relatively weak primary source. Even though the subject of this research is relatively recent, the author was probably ten years too late to interview activists from the key periods. However other primary non - oral sources were located, particularly Shropshire material within the national records of farmworkers unions and other organisations, but most significantly the undiscovered information waiting to be gleaned from the local press. These have enabled sufficient primary material to be assembled. In addition, the growing secondary sources on farmworkers have been studied and distilled. They have been supplemented by material drawn from a wide range of local literature on topics often considered outside the usual sphere of trade union or labour history. In the end, by these means, enough primary and secondary material has been obtained for a fruitful study.

1. See for example **The TUC Book of the Martyrs of Tolpuddle** (1934) produced for the ' Martyrs' centenary, TUC **The Story of the Dorchester Labourers** (1957) and Joyce Marlow **The Tolpuddle Martyrs** (1971).
2. Frederick Clifford **The Agricultural Lock - Out of 1874** (1875), Edward Richardson **Cloddy in Buckinghamshire** (1872). Clifford was a journalist, and Richardson a Norfolk labourer's son who became a village schoolmaster, union official and then a journalist/emigration agent. Thomas Strange, the Shropshire leader of the 1870's was also a schoolmaster, but his publicity work was confined to his union duties. For Forbes ' who claimed to have ' invented ' Joseph Arch ', see Roger T. Steam **War correspondents and colonial war, c. 1870 - 1900** in John M. MacKenzie (ed.) **Popular imperialism and the military 1850 -1950** (1991) pp.142 -143 and 154.

3. F.E.Green **A History of the English Agricultural Labourer 1870 - 1920** (1920), Ernest Selley **Village Trades Unions in Two Centuries** (1919) and Reg Groves **Sharpen the Sickle! The History of the Farmworkers' Union** (1949).

4. Joseph Arch **Joseph Arch : The Story of His Life, Told by Himself** (1898), George Edwards **From Crowscaring to Westminister** (1922) p.90. Examples of the NALU membership emblems are found in the collections of National Museum of Labour History, Manchester ; Norfolk Rural Life Museum, Gressenhall and the Museum of East Anglian Life, Stowmarket. Many of Arch's working class supporters believed the story put about by his enemies, that he had become Sir Joseph Arch and that he lived in a mansion. In fact he continued to live in his cottage at Barford, Warwickshire. Edwards **was** knighted for ' services to agriculture ', but felt that he deserved a peerage from Ramsay MacDonald ! (Information from his son Noel Edwards, Fakenham Norfolk 1982)

5. Arthur Marsh and Victoria Ryan **Historical Directory of Trade Unions** (1984) Vol.1 p.302.

6. Groves op.cit. and Howard Newby **The Deferential Worker : A study of Farmworkers in East Anglia** (1977).

7. Similar religious themes are well documented in David Vincent **Bread Knowledge and Freedom : A Study of Nineteenth Working Class Autobiography** (1981). The Edwards papers at the Norfolk Record Office are also dominated by his religious life, and consist mainly of sermons in laborious handwriting. He was taught to read by his wife in his early 20s, and probably remained semi - literate. The 1923 strike is mentioned in **Ploughboy's Progress**, a sequel Edwards worked on with his son, Noel Edwards, before his death in 1933, but this has never been published.

8. Alun Howkins **Poor Labouring Men : Rural Radicalism in Norfolk 1870 - 1923** (1985), p.150 - 3.

9. Groves op.cit.p.245, gives a figure of 162,533 for the number of NUAW members in 1947, whilst Howard Newby **The Deferential Worker - A Study of Farm Workers in East Anglia** (1977) p.228, gives a more conservative estimate of 136,839. Josiah Sage **The Memoirs of Josiah Sage** (1951), Howkins op.cit., and see John Saville **Paxton Chadwick** (1993).

10. J.P.D.Dunbabin **The Revolt of the Field : The Agricultural Labourers' Movement in the 1870's** Past and Present No.26 1963, and **The Incidence and Organisation of Agricultural Trades Unionism in the 1870s** Agricultural History Review Vol. V 1968. A.J.Peacock **The Revolt of the Field in East Anglia** (1968), later published in J.P.D.Dunbabin **Rural Discontent in 19th.c Britain** (1974) (Peacock, although coming from rural Cambridgeshire was not a NUAW sponsored student, but a member of the ETU.) Rex Russell **The Revolt of the Field in Lincolnshire** (1956), Michael Madden **The NUAW 1906 - 1956 - A Study in the Development of Leadership** B.Litt. thesis Oxford University

1956. Newby op.cit. also uses F.D.Mills **The NUAW** Ph.D. thesis Reading University 1965, which is a fairly dry sociological account which concentrates on the 1950s and 60s.

11. Howkins op.cit. pp 57 - 59. For Horn's unanalytical approach also see James Obelkevich's review of her **The Rural World 1780 - 1850 : Social Change in the English Countryside** (1980) in Society for the Study of Labour History Bulletin no.42 Spring 1981 p.66.

12. Nigel Scotland **Methodism and the Revolt of the Field** (1981) and Alan Armstrong **Farmworkers in England and Wales : A Social and Economic History 1779 -1980** (1988), (He points out that ' in the 1930's there were, almost certainly, more farmworkers' wives in the Womens' Institutes than husbands in trade unions.' p.249)

13. See also Mutch's article **Lancashire's ' Revolt of the Field ' : the Ormskirk farmworkers' strike of 1913** North West Labour History Society Bulletin No.8 1982 and George R. Boyer and Timothy J. Halton **Did Joseph Arch raise Agricultural Wages ? - Rural Trade Unions and the Labour Market in late 19th. century England.** Economic History Review 47 (2) May 1994.

14. Ross McKibbin **The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910 - 1924** (1974), Chris Howard **Expectations born to death : local Labour Party expansion in the 1920's** in Jay Winter (ed) **The Working Class in Modern British History** (1983).

15. Alun Howkins **Edwardian Liberalism and Industrial Unrest : a class view of the decline of Liberalism** History Workshop Journal No.4 Autumn 1977, John Howe **Liberals, Lib - Labs, and Independent Labour in North Gloucestershire** Midland History Vo.XI 1986, David Howell **British Workers and the Independent Labour Party 1888 - 1906.** (1983) and Duncan Tanner **Political Change in the Labour Party 1900 -1918** (1990). The rural labour movement is also not discussed in detail in Kenneth D.Brown **The English Labour Movement 1700 - 1951** (1982).

16. See for example Alec Spoor **White Collar Union - 60 Years of NALGO** (1967) or Sir William Richardson **A Union of Many Trades - The History of USDAW** (1979). For railway trade unions see G.W.Alcock **50 Years of Railway Trades Unionism** (1922), Philip S. Bagwell **The Railwaymen - The History of the NUR** (1963), J.R.Raynes **Engines and Men - The History of ASLEF** (1950), Raymond Williams **The Social Significance of 1926** Llafur Vo.2.No.2. Spring 1977 and Emmet O' Connor **Agrarian Unrest and the Labour Movement in County Waterford 1917 - 1923** . Saothar No.6 1980.

17. G.C.Baugh **Victoria County History** Vol.3 (1979), Irene Gregory **The East Shropshire Coalfield in the Great Depression** M.A.thesis Keele University (1978), and A.E.Jenkins **Titterstone Clee Hills - Everyday Life, Industrial History and Dialect** (1982) p.41.

18. P.H.J.H.Gosden **The Friendly Societies in England 1815 - 1875** (1961), G.Crossick **An Artisan Elite in Victorian Society** (1978), T.R.Tholfsen **Working Class Radicalism in Mid - Victorian Britain** (1976), Walter G.Cooper **The AOF Friendly Society 150 years**

1834 - 1984 (1984), Roger Logan **Grandfather was a Forester** (1990), Sherri J. Brown **Friendly Societies and their Symbols and Ritual.** Group for Regional Studies in Museums Journal No.10 October 1982, James Obelkevich **Religion and Society : South Lindsay 1825 - 1875** (1976), Rex Russell **Three Lincolnshire Labourers' Movements** (1996), and Alun Howkins **' The Great Momentous Time' : Rural Radicalism in Norfolk 1870 - 1923** Unpublished Ph.D. University of Sussex 1982 Chapter 4. Neave op.cit.pp.1 - 8 has the most comprehensive discussion of the sources.

19. The standard works on co - operatives are Arnold Bonner **British Co - operation** (1970) and A.M.Saunders, P.Sargeant, and Robert Peers **Consumer Co - operatives in Great Britain** (1938). Sadly the 1994 150th. Co - op anniversary celebrations failed to produce a substantial modern history, only Johnston Birchall **Co - Op : The People's Business** (1994). A recent example of local society studies were produced by Co -operative Heritage Wales produced in 1989. The only work impingeing on Shropshire is David Castledine **Co - operative Stores in North - East Wales** Clwyd Historian Autumn 1994 No. 33.

20. The standard work on the British Legion is Graham Wootton **The History of the British Legion** (1956). Otherwise the only sources on the ex - service organisations are David Englander **The National Union of Ex - Servicemen and the Labour Movement 1918 - 20** History Vol.76 No. 246 February 1991, Alun Howkins **Poor Labouring Men : Rural Radicalism in Norfolk 1870 - 1923** (1984), Nick Mansfield **Class Conflict and Village War Memorials 1914 - 24** Rural History (1995) Vol. 6 1, and Angela Gaffney **' Poppies on the Up - Platform ' - The Commemoration of the Great War in Wales** Ph.D. U.C.Cardiff 1996.

21. See Dorothy Sylvester **The Rural Landscape of the Welsh Borderland** (1969), Trevor Rowley **The Shropshire Landscape** (1972), and **The Landscape of the Welsh Marches** (1986), W.W. Watts **Shropshire - The Geography of the County** (1939), Vincent Waite **Shropshire Hill Country** (1970) and Gilbert Wooding Robinson **A Survey of Soils and Agriculture of Shropshire** (1911). Curiously the classic Victorian geological study J.D. La Touche **A Handbook of the Geology of Shropshire**, was written by the Vicar of Stokesay who chaired meetings for Strange's Shropshire union in the 1870s.

22. Victoria County History (Vol. IV) (1989), Paul Stamper **' The Farmer Feeds Us All ' - A Short History of Shropshire Agriculture** (1989), Henry Rider Haggard **Rural England** (1902) and Malcolm Wanklyn **Agriculture and Agrarian Society** (unpublished paper). There is some material on the county in F.M.L.Thompson **English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century** (1963). For an insightful American view on the failure of English historians to develop a *regional* historiography see David Hackett Fischer **Albion's Seed** (1989) pp.788 - 789. Arthur Hollins **The Farmer, The Plough and the Devil** (1984) and A.B.Tinsley **With Horse and Cart and Friend - Memories of a Salop Farm Boy** (1976).

23. The nineteenth century ' sensitive ' school includes Richard Jeffries, W.H.Hudson, and Arthur Machen. It continued in the twentieth century with writers like Adrian Bell, H.J.Massingham, G.H.Sturt and even Henry Williamson.

24. J.L. and B. Hammond **The Village Labourer** (1911), Hasbach op.cit., F.E. Green **The Awakening of Rural England** (1912) , **The Tyranny of the Countryside** (1913), and **A History of the English Agricultural Labourer** (1920). E.P.Thompson **The Making of the English Working Class** (1963) and E.J. Hobsbawm and George Rude **Captain Swing** (1969).

25. Howard Newby op.cit. (1977), and **Country Life : A Social History of Rural England** (1987), Alan Armstong **Farmworkers : A Social and Economic History 1770 - 1980** (1988), and Alun Howkins **Reshaping Rural England : A Social History 1850 - 1925** (1991).

26. Keith Snell **Annals of the Labouring Poor : Social Change and Agrarian England 1660 - 1900** (1985), J.M.Neeson **Commoners : Common Right, Enclosure and Social Change in England 1700 - 1820** (1994).

27. George Ewart Evans published thirteen books on rural life and oral history between **Ask the Fellows Who Cut the Hay** (1956) and **Spoken History** (1987). Raphael Samuel (ed.) **Village Life and Labour**, James Obelkevich **Religion and Society : South Lindsay 1825 - 1875.** (1976) and Ian Carter **Farm Life in North East Scotland 1840 - 1914**, (1979). For Pamela Horn see the bibliography and Alun Howkins **Social History and Agricultural History** Agricultural History Review Vol.40 II 1992.

28. Barrie Trinder **The Industrial Revolution in Shropshire** (1973), **The Darbys of Coalbrookdale** (1974) and **A History of Shropshire** (1983).

29. The most useful modern local histories are Jenkins op cit., B.E.Simmonds **Brown Clee Liberty and Clee St. Margaret** (1992), Janet Preshous **Bishop's Castle Well - Remembered** (1990), R.K. Moore **Memories of Clun : Edwardian Life in a Small Rural Town** (1986) and Sheila Hamer **Clun Dialect Words** (1990). Anthony P.Cohen **Belonging : Identity and Social Organisation in British Rural Cultures** (1982).

30. For these and other authors, see Gordon Dickens **An Illustrated Literary Guide to Shropshire** (1987).

31. See also the same author's works **Zacharias Walker - Norfolk Radical and Trades Unionist** Norfolk Archaeology Vol.27 Pt.2 1979, and **Agricultural Trades Unionism in Gloucestershire 1872 - 1950** (1991). (A parallel with Scotland's argument about Methodism and farmworkers is to be found with Robert F.Wearmouth's work on miners) Obelkevich op.cit., Howkins **Poor Labouring Men** op.cit. Chapter 3, Mills op.cit. and Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England **Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting - houses : Shropshire and Staffordshire** (1986), John D. Gay The **Geography of Religion in England** (1971), William E. Morris **The History of Methodism in**

Shrewsbury and District (1961), Howard Burrows **Religious Provision and Practice in some mainly Rural Poor Law Districts of the lowland marches 1815 - 1914.** Ph.D.thesis Wolverhampton University 1991.

32. E.W.Gladstone **The Shropshire Yeomanry 1795 - 1945** (1953), Major W. de Wood (ed.) **The History of the KSLI in the Great War 1914 - 18** (1925) and Martin Pugh **The Tories and the People 1880 -1935** (1935).

33. The Norfolk branch minutes are in the union's national deposit at the Institute of Agricultural History, Reading University. George Ewart Evans papers, Faber and Faber Archive, Harlow. A systematic search for other material was made by the author in 1982 - 83, whilst working for the Norfolk Museum Service, with the assistance of the union. Whilst this unearthed valuable collections of photographs, regalia, ephemera, badges, membership cards and emblems, no archives were found. The WU minute book is part of the TGWU collection at the Modern Records Centre, Warwick University.

34. See Pretty op.cit., Brown op.cit. and Scotland op.cit.

35. Howkins **Poor Labouring Men** op.cit, in particular, has made great use of oral history. For its use in museum exhibitions on farmworkers see the author's **' George Edwards ' and ' Norfolk and the Great War ' : Oral History at the Norfolk Rural Life Museum** Oral History Journal Vol.14 No.2 1986. For the methodology of oral history see George Ewart Evans op.cit. and Paul Thompson **The Voice of the Past** (1978).

36. For ' foreigners ' see for instance **Eddowe's Shropshire Journal** 10.1.1872 , and **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 10.10.19. The NUAW column ran from 25.9.1925 to 30.10.25.

37. The primary collections used were those of The Institute of Agricultural History, Reading; The National Museum of Labour History, Manchester; and The Norfolk Rural Life Museum, Gressenhall.

38. Letter from P.R.Kelly, Secretary, Shrewsbury Trades Council, 19.7.92. The records of the latter dated from 1904, according to a letter from E.B.Blake, secretary of the Shrewsbury Bookbinders union to the **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 12.8.21.

39. This view is supported by the the Ironbridge Institute, John Powell, Librarian wrote : ' Oral tradition has it that there was not a great deal of overt trade union participation in the area due to hostile employers.' (Letter to author 6.12.94), and by conversations with historians Barrie Trinder ; Bob Cromarty, who is working on Shropshire politics at this period ; and by the work in progress of Don Harris, a Ph.D. student at Birmingham University, who is studying late nineteenth century emigration from Shropshire. Only eight pieces on the activities of the Shropshire agent, Arthur Latham, have been found in the **Shropshire Chronicle,** compared to hundreds for farmworkers' leaders. These are for 14.6.12, 25.7.19, 29.8.19, 30.1.20, 27.6.24, 22.6.24, 6.11.25, and 1.3.29.

40. I am grateful to Roger Leese of Wolverhampton University for this suggestion after some of the preliminary conclusions of this thesis were presented at a seminar in March 1996.

41. Shropshire Record Office (SRO) P/177 Parish records Church of St. Michael and All Saints, Lydbury North. For the NUAW strike see F.E.Green op.cit. p.246 and **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 2.6.16. SRO 4727/1 Captain Corbett Court AOF. The Conservative Association records are SRO 552/114. The Edgton chapel records are SRO 4942/4/10/1 - 12.

42. The SRO material between 1900 and 1930 is : 1927/1 Loyal Vale of Clun Lodge resolution book 1908 - 1918, 667 729 / 1 - 10 and 667 745 / 1 - 2 Hawkstone Friendly Society 1832 - 1954, Loyal South Shropshire District, Independent Order of Oddfellows, Annual Statement 1923, 4727 / 113 - 114 Minutes Captain Corbett Court of AOF Shawbury, and 4727 / 117 - 150 papers Unity Lodge, Moreton Mill.

43. For East Anglia see for example the author's **Volunteers and Recruiting** in Gerald Gliddon (ed.) **Norfolk and Suffolk in the Great War** (1988) and compare with **Shrewsbury Chronicle** ' To Arms ' 28.8.14, recruiting advertisements for the KSLI , 23.4.15, and reports of the ' Shrewsbury Pals ', 1.9.14 and 12.2.15.

Chapter 2 - The Growth of Agricultural Trades Unionism in Shropshire 1900 - 1930

This chapter will outline the chronological growth of agricultural trades unionism within the county between the chosen dates. These have been chosen to encompass the first appearance of the Workers' Union (WU) in north Shropshire at the beginning of the century and its amalgamation with the Transport and General Workers' Union in 1929. The dates also stretch from the Edwardian origins of the National Union of Agricultural Workers (NUAW) to its partial recovery from the post war agricultural depression. The chapter is divided into a brief section on the nineteenth century and then major sections on the WU and NUAW. In general terms the unions in Shropshire follow the same patterns of growth and decline identified by other historians between 1900 and 1930. This consisted of an erratic early development, with the outbreak of the Great War causing a temporary decline, followed by a rapid rise of membership towards the end of the war, which became even more pronounced after demobilisation. However, the fall in agricultural prices from 1920 caused almost as precipitous a decline in organised farmworkers and the degree to which this had been stabilised by 1930 seems to vary between different counties and even localities. The extent to which all these developments can be estimated is confused by the active competition between the two unions within Shropshire.

Nineteenth century antecedents.

Before examining agricultural trades unionism in the twentieth century, it is worth briefly exploring its nineteenth century antecedents in Shropshire to examine possible causal effects on the growth and distribution of unions in the twentieth century. These illustrate a rapid growth, and a drastic decline, dwindling to virtually a handful of activists. This pattern is typical of British rural radicalism. It blighted any attempt to organise prior to the establishment of a structured national union, and continued to dog it thereafter.

Nineteenth century movements also illustrate the local nature of trades unionism between Joseph Arch's NALU in the 1870s and the establishment of effective national unions at the end of the Great War. Shropshire examples are amongst dozens chronicled by Reg Groves for this period, which could only hope to have made a partial local difference to wage levels and which at best survived only by incorporation into a larger body. Recent work by Boyer and Hatton, though, suggests that the NALU at least did have a significant effect in raising wages before the onset of the late Victorian agricultural depression, and played a part in maintaining them at a relatively high level. **1.**

In 1871, a series of local meetings were held in south - west Shropshire, which led to the formation of a **North Herefordshire and South Shropshire Labourers' Mutual Improvement Society.** Its young secretary and dynamic leader was Thomas Strange, a Primitive Methodist schoolmaster from Adforton, near Leintwardine, just over the Herefordshire border. **2.** This does not mean that there was organised Methodist support for this new union ; indeed Strange's own circuit was criitical of his actions (See p.185). More significantly, he had the support of radical M.P.s like Henry Dixon (President of the Birmingham League). Joseph Arch was to enjoy similar Liberal support the following year in his agitation. However, Strange's methods were different from Arch's aggressive reliance on threatening strikes ; he attempted to shame farmers into giving farmworkers a rise. He persuaded local vicars, gentlemen, and in one case, a doctor, to chair large well-attended village meetings for the men to state their case. Strange also had the active support of the reforming landowner and future Conservative M.P., Sir Baldwin Leighton, of Loton Park, Shropshire. Despite the hostility of the Tory county press, particularly because of Liberal involvement, these meetings were fully, and apparently fairly, reported. **3.** The farmers were exposed as bullying and mean - spirited, particularly as at several meetings Strange had arranged for the attendance of Staffordshire farmers, who were prepared, there and then, to offer higher wages to men willing to go and settle near Walsall or Birmingham. Emigration was a plank of Joseph Arch's union, but Strange, endeavouring to cope with rural overpopulation, saw it as the mainstay of his organisation. He welcomed Mr.Gould, an Americal consul, to the inaugural meeting at Brampton Bryan, much to the alarm of the gentry. **4.**

In early 1872, the union started to call itself the **West of England Agricultural Labourers' Association** (hereafter **West of England**) and rapidly became caught up in the ' Revolt of the Field ', so it is difficult to disentangle its development. Leighton took part in Arch's meeting forming the **Warwickshire Labourers' Union** on Good Friday 1872, and the **West of England** was represented at the famous National Congress organised by Arch at Whitsun 1872. Indeed, Strange was called upon to move the resolution forming the **National Agricultural Labourers' Union,** (NALU) after several delegates pointed out that his organisation predated Arch's meetings. **5.** However, by September, both Strange and Leighton were publicly critical of Arch's ' class prejudices ' and had withdrawn their organisation from it. There is no evidence that they had officially ' joined ' until part of the union in Herefordshire split to become a district of the NALU. **6.** Many of Strange's statements have an Owenite, if not millenarian quality to them. By the end of 1872 the union was negotiating to purchase a farm to be run co-operatively, and there is some suggestion that this project lasted until the end of the decade. **7.** However, by this time the **West of England** had long since disappeared.

Strange and Leighton were not the only people to quarrel with Joseph Arch. Soon a whole ' Federal ' farmworkers' union structure rivalled the NALU, which historians like Howkins argue was more effective than Arch's union in reacting to local demands and conditions. It may be that individual branches of Shropshire farmworkers continued to be associated with the NALU, but evidence is sketchy. Arch was present at a meeting held in Presteigne, just over the border in 1874, and in 1919, ' at a meeting in Craven Arms, two veterans came forward to testify that they had been members of Joseph Arch's old Union in 1872.' Dunbabin, in his work on pre - 1900 unions, places Shropshire in the category of ' very slight unionism '. **8.**

The structure and geographical distribution of Strange's union may give some clues to the development of Shropshire unionism in the twentieth century. It was initially based in about a dozen villages of the fertile, but low waged, valley of the river Teme, on either side of the Shropshire/Herefordshire border. Other branches were then formed in the hillier west, at Bishop's Castle, Clun and Knighton, in neighbouring Radnorshire. In March 1872 Strange held meetings in Shrewsbury, and at the Lion Assembly Rooms, Bomere Heath (see Photograph 1), a large ' open ' village eight miles north of the county town. Reports indicate that all these meetings were attended by labourers from villages from several miles around. Acting on letters of support from potential members in the West country, and the enthusiasm of William Morris, the radical proprietor of the **Swindon Advertiser**, Strange then launched the West of England union. Although later writers state that this achieved a membership of 30,000 in six counties, this was not claimed by Strange himself. Actual membership, as opposed to interest, is notoriously difficult to calculate in the millenarian atmosphere of the 1870s and even the 3,500 estimated by Dunbabin, concentrated in Shropshire and Herefordshire, may be an overestimate. **9.**

However it can be concluded that the leaderships of the 1870s unions in Shropshire had some influence on later unions. Although no individual activists have been located who were involved in both movements, certain geographical areas of the county do show continuity between the two periods of union activity, as areas where the union was strong. These include the Teme valley in the extreme south - west of the county, and the ' sandstone ' villages around Bomere Heath. Some memory of organisation or individual members from the 1870's may have been carried over into a short-lived union founded at Shobden, in north Herefordshire in 1892. **The Herefordshire Agricultural and General Workers' Union** was, according to F. E. Green, established directly through a ' red van ' meeting held under the auspices of the radical **English Land Restoration League. 10.** It may be no accident that, within a generation, Herefordshire was to become a strong recruiting ground for the Workers'

Union. However the roots of that organisation are found at the other end of the county of Shropshire as the nineteenth century was ending and the next section of the chapter will describe this development.

The growth and decline of the Workers' Union (WU)

John Beard of Ellerdine Heath was typical of many working - class young men whose intelligence had been sharpened by board schooling and by the Wesleyan Methodist chapel. However, few country boys were readers of Blatchford's **Clarion**, and he was to join the very small number of rural working - class men who were to develop careers as trade union officials. **11.** The beginnings ot this process in his area of north - east Shropshire were not auspicious, despite later attempts to give it a heroic gloss. **12.** Beard read, probably in the **Clarion** or **Reynold's News**, of the formation of the Workers' Union (WU) by veteran militant Tom Mann, as a general union for all unorganised workers. In the spring of 1899, Beard simply wrote to the union and offered to help organise in his district. The result was an ill - starred meeting in Ironbridge, addressed by Charles Duncan, the union's organiser, which failed to recruit a single ironworker. **13.**

Beard had worked on the land as a boy, and undaunted, saw his future as a Wellsian career socialist. With the aid of John Simpson, another Methodist and farmworker from Aycherley, ten miles north of Ellerdine, Beard took the original and courageous step of trying to set up WU branches of agricultural workers. Simpson wrote a series of letters about famworkers' wages and conditions to the local press which generated a lively correspondence, and resulted in his dismissal from his job. (It can be speculated whether this approach owed anything to Strange's use of the press twenty five years earlier, but there is no direct evidence to link the two campaigns). Beard and Simpson held meetings in Ellerdine, Prees and Market Drayton and helped by a small group of supporters, succeeded in setting up a number of branches, claiming a thousand members and linked to the wider movement the WU was establishing in the West Midlands. **14.** The first attempt, in 1900, by Beard and Simpson to conduct an industrial dispute was a total disaster and the organisation collapsed. In Beard's own words : ' We had no experience to go upon and no traditions to appeal to . . . when it came to the point of bargaining, they lost confidence and were broken up.' **15.**

Beard was still active in the embryonic socialist movement in Shropshire, chairing a meeting addressed by Keir Hardie in Wellington in the spring of 1903, but by the following year, both he and Simpson were in Birmingham. Simpson became a prosperous insurance agent, and Beard was taken on as an organiser by the expanding WU, where he enjoyed a relatively successful career, ending as President (see Photograph 2). He also had a parallel

commitment to the labour movement as a councillor, and then alderman on Birmingham Corporation.

Seeking rural roots to rival those of the NUAW, the WU exaggerated the effects of Beard's early campaign. In his Wrekin bye - election campaign in 1920, Charles Duncan spoke of : ' organising the agricultural labourers some twenty one years before. What had pleased him more than anything else was to find that some of the old warriors were still alive to carry on the fight for better organisation, better conditions and better chances for their wives and children.' Beard also claimed that veterans of 1899 were active again from 1912, and particularly after the Great War. **16.** There is no independent evidence for this, and as we shall see, outside Beard's own village of Ellerdine Heath, the WU was not particularly strong in north - east Shropshire, which suggests that the 1899 campaign had little long term impact.

Instead the principal outcome was to give the WU an entree into the world of the agricultural worker and to produce an organiser (Beard himself), who rapidly learned by his naive mistakes to become a skilled negotiator as the Birmingham officer of the union. In the attempted TUC arbitration between the NUAW and WU in 1918, the latter referred directly to Beard's 1899 campaign, and the issue continued to sour the relationship between the two unions. **17.** Beside the presence of Beard himself and his continuing wish to improve conditions for the farmworkers with whom he had grown up, there was a rationale within the WU for trying to organise in rural districts.

Charles Duncan, who had spoken at Beard's first meeting in Ironbridge, had in 1900 ousted Tom Mann from effective leadership of the WU. Becoming General Secretary, Duncan reformed the union's chaotic finances, saving it from bankruptcy and moved it politically to the right, away from Mann's proto - syndicalism. The WU was already developing its reputation as an ' undercutting union '. **18.** Ostensibly, the WU justified its recruitment of farmworkers on the grounds of reducing the threat to town workers from undercutting and potentially strike breaking rural labourers. The same case was made later in Shropshire by W.H. Edwards, the WU local organiser : ' The condition of unemployment in towns had not been improved owing to the fact that the wages paid in the country districts were very low. In Shrewsbury today there were agricultural labourers working on buildings, whilst builders' labourers were walking the streets.' **19.** This argument was also accepted by the NUAW. In speeches to the TUC in later years, George Edwards referred to ' agricultural labourers (who) left the land competing with the miners and railwaymen', and ' up to now the agricultural labourer has been a menace to the town worker ' . **20.** Ironically, in Edwards' better organised East Anglia, farmers in dispute with the NUAW recruited their blackleg workers from the Cambridge slums or the wharves of Great Yarmouth. **21.**

The rest of this section will describe the rise and decline of support for the WU in Shropshire between 1900 and 1930. An attempt has been made to estimate the WU membership at various points, using **Annual Reports**, the WU **Record** and the local press. The difficulties of achieving accuracy in this process are notorious with farmworkers and this is compounded in the case of the WU, because there are no separate figures for its agricultural membership and its overall national membership level was kept vague, deliberately so during its post war decline. This makes any account dependent to a large extent on the reported actions of local and national activists.

The first **Annual Report** of the WU was issued in 1905 and several Shropshire branches existed from then until the outbreak of the Great War, serviced by John Beard from Saltley, Birmingham. These branches were located in the principal towns of the east Shropshire coalfield, and consisted mainly of unskilled workers in the iron and engineering trades. They were an overspill of the WU's strength in the Black Country, where it was to win an important strike in 1912. **22.** There is a long tradition of these east Shropshire branches being ' mixed ' i.e. recruiting members from various trades and occupations. The TGWU still includes farmworkers in its Telford branch whose main strength is in the ' sunrise ' industries, so it is possible that the Dawley, Oakengates and Wellington branches included farmworkers from 1905, perhaps with a handful of survivors from Beard's efforts in 1899. Maintaining ' mixed branches ', as well as spreading the costs of organising, were an important part of the WU's philosophy : ' Agricultural labourers are often compelled to go into industrial centres to find employment, and having no traditions of trade unions to guide them, are ready to undersell town workers.' **23.**

Elsewhere in Shropshire, the active Shrewsbury branch which was to dominate the county WU for the next fifteen years, was not founded until 1912. **24.** The following year, the union appointed a national organiser for agricultural labourers ; Robert Owen Hornagold, an ageing ex - Norfolk farmworker, now based in Worcestershire. Although no record of his activities in Shropshire has been located, he certainly visited Herefordshire and inspired local activist Sydney Box who, it is claimed, had ' established 50 branches .... by the end of 1913 '. **25.**

The WU national push for farmworkers fell to newly appointed organisers, H.H. Lawrie and Arthur Flavell, who were proteges of John Beard. By 1913 the Midlands District of the union was dominant, and its members were prepared to vote their organiser, Beard, into the Presidency. From this position of strength, he took a direct interest in farmworkers. Beard continued to be based in Birmingham, and the geographical proximity of his native district enabled him to justify the part-time employment of his Midlands organisers in Shropshire. **26.**

The weakness of the WU was in consolidating a grass roots organisation. Its organisers could attract members, helped by its very low subscription rate, particularly during a local dispute, but finding activists to continue the life of a branch was more difficult. Thus, in Shropshire, ' a number ' of agricultural branches were claimed in 1913 and 1914, but financial returns from these locations were not forthcoming, suggesting that they only existed on paper. **27.** Although forty branches were said to have been represented at a delegate conference in March 1914 at Shrewsbury, only the branches at Ellerdine, Ruyton XI Towns, Craven Arms and possibly Shifnal, could be referred to as purely rural. It needed the ' representatives from industrial branches of Donnington, Dawley, Ironbridge and delegates from Shrewsbury ' to provide the meeting with a core of activists to conduct the business and formulate demands. Even so, both Beard and Duncan (President and General Secretary) were needed to give speeches, together with W.H. Edwards (see Photograph 3), a member of the Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers, who was secretary of the Shrewsbury Trades Council. Edwards had already organised builders' labourers in Shrewsbury and was to become the key local figure in the WU. **28.** Hitherto, the development of the WU had gone undetected in the pages of the county newspaper, and the first report attracted anti-trade union letters to the **Shrewsbury Chronicle** from the Rural League and the National Farmers' Union. **29.**

Shropshire was taking part in the rapid rise in the national membership of the WU, which grew from 18,000 in 1911, to 143,000 in 1914. The county was also experiencing the widespread but patchy rural trades unionism, which on occasions in the spring of 1914 shared many of the characteristics of the contemporary urban industrial militancy, and which is aptly described by Reg Groves as ' The Rural Rebellion '. **30.** In almost a ' Wobbly' style, the WU found a dispute, and organised around it. One example was the peat cutters of Whixall in north Shropshire, who appeared at Shrewsbury's ' Labour Sunday ' :

' Conspicuous among them were some 30 men from Whixall who carried banners bearing the inscriptions " The Workers' Union Whixall Lock Out " and " We fight for liberty. Down with Oppression ". **31.** Nationally the WU reported ' submitting schedules to 3,000 farmers for wage increases ' but ' only fifteen in Shropshire ', and the location of these is not known. **32.** The NUAW was also taking part in this movement, both nationally and within the county and the confusion between the two unions in the press complicates the story. The 1914 haysel strike in the Chirbury area, on the Montgomery border, is an example of this and may even indicate that both unions had branches here. **33.**

With the problem of branches existing only on paper, and its tactic of seizing on existing disputes, it is difficult to estimate the WU's Shropshire membership. The forty branches of early 1914 could indicate a total membership of say 5,000. However a minority of these,

perhaps under a thousand, were farmworkers. This represents a tiny minority of Shropshire farmworkers, but still compared well with the NUAW's better documented membership. Certainly the full time WU officers, no doubt supported by Beard, put some effort into implementing the March conference demands and a new organiser, Arthur Flavell, was based at Oakengates to service a new Mid-Shropshire District. The impression, based on those branches making a financial return, is that the new district consisted largely of the industrial workers of the East Shropshire coalfield. Nonetheless, organiser H.H. Lawrie could report: ' During the first half of the year much time was spent among the agricultural workers of Shripshire, with the intention of tackling the farmers during harvest time, but the war intervened.' **34.**

The outbreak of the Great War had an immediate effect on the union : ' The branches have been shattered by the war. The secretary, president and the majority of the staunch members enlisted, in some cases en bloc.' **35.** The WU's national leadership immediately supported the war effort; Beard in particular resigned from the Independent Labour Party (I.L.P.), joined his local volunteer force, and delighted in appearing in uniform at union meetings. **36.** Curiously the momentum of the 1914 strike movement was maintained, perhaps due to the initial wartime economic dislocation and as late as July 1915, Flavell initiated a series of strikes, which ' could have pulled off a magnificent victory for the agricultural workers had it not been for the Board of Trade interference.' Flavell's assessment, perhaps trying to impress head office, was woefully over-optimistic about the WU's actual strength. Even he had to admit that the first year of the was ' had played havoc with the farmworkers' branches.' **37.** Key activists like W. H. Edwards, now chairman of the Shrewsbury branch of the WU, also joined the army. From neighbouring Herefordshire, Sydney Box reported on the general apathy : ' Work in country districts continues to be difficult . . . workers are under the impression that there will be conscription, which stops them taking an interest in their own affairs.' **38.**

The Shropshire contraction of the WU is reflected in the number of contributing branches listed in **Annual Reports.** By 1916 only two rural branches existed, with membership largely confined to Shrewsbury and the eastern coalfield, and even here a strong branch such as Dawley, in existence from at least 1905, had collapsed. In November 1916, Flavell was moved from Oakengates to Wolverhampton where, no doubt, his time was more profitably spent organising core membership in a Black country swollen with munitions workers. **39.** Amongst WU farmworkers nationally, according to Hyman : ' At the start of 1917 organisation was almost extinguished.' In contrast the NUAW experienced some growth during the middle years of the war. **40.**

By the harvest of 1917, the position had altered in the WU's favour. Initially the growth was in the Home Counties, where London organiser George Dallas found receptive farmworkers living near munitions workers and others made temporarily affluent by the war. (The same situation was noted gloomily by the Shropshire NFU). More importantly, the WU leadership used their Home Counties members to claim from central government a high proportion of the nominations on the new Agricultural Wages Board (AWB), to the outrage of the NUAW. **41.** Although members of both the WU and NUAW had taken part in the extension of the corporate state, the WU leadership by leading the union into a more patriotic position, made it easier for the government to give them preferment on the AWB. In Shropshire there is evidence of the same process. Early in 1916, R. Evans, secretary of the Bishop's Castle branch, joined the local Military Service Act tribunal and on his return from France in January 1918, newly demobilised W. H. Edwards was lobbying for WU representation on the local AWB, from his new power base of the ex-servicemen. **42.**

With the AWB as a spur to recruitment, ' In May 1918, the union claimed that 400 of its branches covered agriculture, with a membership of 30,000.' **43.** In a **Record** article of April 1918, John Beard's headline proclaimed ' A Better Outlook for the Farm Worker ', and claimed nationally one hundred WU AWB representatives. Although he found ' some difficulty with farmers in the Lilleshall and Donnington areas. . . .Shropshire membership is well on the way towards 4,000.' Clearly this included both the Ironbridge and Oakengates industrial branches, each over a thousand strong by this stage of the war. **44.** By August 1918 Edwards, now a full time organiser, had formed a Shropshire District, ' representing the whole of our agricultural branches in the area. . . which met, asking for a minimum rate for stockmen to at least 36 shillings.' **45.** The WU was undoubtedly growing in Shropshire, but again the consolidation into fee paying branches was slow, with the addition of a handful of agricultural branches reported in 1918, and only two more, at Church Stretton and Leebotwood, the following year. **46.** Edwards began holding monthly district committee meetings early in 1919, and was also negotiating for the county council roadmen (most of whom had been farmworkers). **47.** As President of the Shrewsbury branch of the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Soldiers and Sailors (NFDDSS), Edwards and his colleague Flavell established the organisation on a county wide basis, agitating particularly against the official Peace celebrations of July 1919. However, the long term benefits to the union were limited since the NFDDSS disaffiliated from the Labour Party in the following September. (See p.132) **48.**

The WU's rapid national growth was not reflected in Shropshire in the pages of the **Record**. Indeed 1919 was marked only by a series of articles by Beard on the ' Early Struggles of the Union '. Nevertheless, the 1920 **Annual Report** listed a crop of new rural branches in

Shropshire and its borders, and although it is impossible to compute farming membership, a guess would be that it exceeded 2,000. **49.** Political favouritism, rather than its relative strength in comparison to the NUAW, meant that the WU fared well in the composition of the first Shropshire Agricultural Wages Board. From an employees' side of twelve, at least five were WU activists, including the two organisers, Edwards and Flavell. **50.**

By January 1920 the WU was the largest non-federated union in the country, with half a million members, of whom 150,000 were reckoned to be members of rural branches. **51.** In Shropshire, the WU's fortunes should have been improved by the selection of Charles Duncan, their General Secretary, to fight the two Wrekin bye - elections in February and November 1920. Duncan's local connections were broadcast : ' In Shropshire he is far from unknown, since the work of organising agricultural labourers carried him into every part of the county ', and meetings at Shifnal and Shrewsbury were held in his support. **52.** Edwards attempted to put the weight of the NFDDSS, boasting 1,300 members, behind Duncan, but the organisation had weakened its links with the labour movement, and was already negotiating an amalgamation with its erstwhile ' non-political ' rivals, the Comrades of the Great War. **53.** The beneficiaries of the powerful ex-service vote on both occasions were independent candidates, promoted by Horatio Bottomley, the proprietor of **John Bull**. Although Duncan's defeats were narrow, and may be partially explained by other factors, they demonstrate that at the height of post-war union growth, even with the full support of the emerging labour movement, including the NUAW, the WU could not attract enough support to secure a winnable seat for the Labour party in the face of entrenched ' local patriotism ' reinforced by the vestiges of wartime jingoism. **54.**

Although a number of new Shropshire branches were recorded in the 1921 **Annual Report**, and were still in existence in 1922, it was inevitable that Shropshire shared in the rapid decline in WU membership, which coincided with the post-war economic downturn. Even the energetic Edwards was stretched servicing the conglomerate WU membership of roadmen, engineering and woodyard workers, as well as farm labourers, and could do little to halt the downward spiral of membership, wages and confidence. **55.** By January 1922, a jubilant **Shrewsbury Chronicle**, although curiously opaque about the situation in its own county, reported the decline in union membership : ' In Hampshire alone 40,000 labourers have left their union in six months.' Shropshire wages were reduced by 1/2d an hour in the February AWB settlement, and despite brave resolutions at WU meetings, the trend could not be reversed. **56.**

Even the **Record**, in its agricultural column, was unspecific in its reports about Shropshire, or indeed any county, in direct contrast to the lively round of NUAW meetings throughout the

county, held to lobby for an improved offer from the AWB and reported in **The Landworker** and the **Shrewsbury Chronicle. 57.** Although the 1923 and 1924 **Annual Reports** indicate branches hanging on (indeed a new branch was formed at Pontesbury, though possibly with a core of quarrymen), membership had clearly fallen. By 1924 the WU claimed 146, 500 members, a drop of 70% since the end of the war, with only 20% of its agricultural strength retained. In order to stabilise finances, fifty officials were dismissed, of whom half were agricultural organisers. **58.**

The haemorrage of members may be the reason for the apparent undermining of the NUAW's position in the spring 1923 wage negotiations, as Edwards saw surrender as the only way of keeping together what remained of the organisation. In this he may have been correct, since there are indications of a slight revival later in the year, with meetings in new villages, and a confident county conference in October. This slight and temporary upturn in the WU's fortunes, may have contributed to the line being held at the next Shropshire Conciliation Committee meeting that same month, and for the first time since 1920, no wage reduction took place. **59.**

In the next year the NUAW seems to have been the main beneficiary of this continuing modest growth, for despite a smattering of meetings, and a minimal decline in the number of branbches, by October 1924, only two of the eight of the workers' side of the Conciliation Committee were from the WU. (These were Edwards and Algernon Pearce, secretary at Ellerdine - the other six were NUAW members). **60.** 1925 saw the Labour Party rural campaign, which had an avowed aim of increasing union membership in the countryside. Although the WU met in Wellington in September, after which ' it expected that a new branch will be opened as a result ', it could only arrange one other meeting at Ruyton, the following month, in contrast to the dozens held by the NUAW. Significantly, the WU reported nationally ' approximately 1,000 ' new members, compared to the nearly 5,000 claimed by the NUAW over the two years of the campaign. **61.**

There is little evidence of the activities of the Shropshire WU in the late 1920s, either in the local press or in the union's journal. It does not seem to have been called out in the General Strike, and the only mention of Edwards' organising (aside from the annual social) was in connection with engineering or local government wage negotiations, and with local Labour Party work. **62.** Only two WU farmworkers' meetings are reported in the late 1920s; at Upton Magna and nearby Allscott, in August 1927. The recently opened sugar beet factory at the latter, probably encouraged the WU to attempt its usual rural/urban branch in a new setting. **63.** However, neither branch seems to have flourished, and neither are mentioned in **Annual Reports.** The overall number of Shropshire branches is remarkably consistent, with 18

recorded in 1925 and 1926, and 17 in the last report before amalgamation with the TGWU, with slightly under half of these being in rural locations. Accepting at face value the 1928 national membership of 123,000 in 1,500 branches, there may have been a Shropshire membership of around 1,500, of which half may have been farmworkers. According to Hyman, by 1929, only an estimated 4,000 agricultural members remained, mainly in Essex and Suffolk, but these Shropshire figures suggest that this is an underestimate. **64.** The impossible financial position of the union, and a good offer from Ernest Bevin, (See p.87), spelt the end of the WU's independent position. Beard's sidelining by the TGWU leadership, and his continuing ill health, meant that the union's special relationship with WU Shropshire farmworkers had ended. So despite the promise of a new beginning in the organisation of Shropshire farmworkers at the start of the century, and the translation of this potential into a large membership at the end of the Great War, the post war agriculture depression resulted in the WU being unable to maintain its membership and slid into a terminal defeat. However, ex - members continued to be active in the TGWU and the Labour party, and in the 1990s the union's ' mixed branches ' continue their existence. **65.**

The growth and progress of the National Union of Agricultural Workers (NUAW)

The driving force behind the NUAW, founded in Norfolk in 1906, was George Edwards. Already 56 by then, he had the appearance of someone much older, as befitted a zealot who had given his life in a series of radical causes : Primitive Methodism, Free Trade, land reform, teetotalism, Liberalism and agricultural trades unionism (see Photograph 5). In the 1906 General Election, Liberalism had swept Norfolk, and Tory farmers sought revenge by dismissing known radical activists among their workforce. An appeal from them to Edwards coincided with a need for the Liberal party to retain an organisation to garner the votes of the rural poor. Edwards had been a union organiser for over thirty years, starting as a branch secretary in Arch's union in the 1870s, when he could barely read and write, and was active in the 1890s revival, even forming his own Norfolk and Norwich Amalgamated Labourers' Union after the NALU collapsed. **66.** Although on a small scale, and based mainly in Norfolk, the union continued to thrive, surviving a potentially damaging split with the Liberal grandees, who payrolled the organisation. In 1910, the union took the title National Agricultural Labourers' and Rural Workers' Union (NALRWU), which was more laying a claim to the national inheritance of Arch's previous efforts than a realistic assessment of the union's impact outside East Anglia. Edwards retired as general secretary in 1912, leaving his brainchild to younger, more socialist-minded colleagues, but retained an influential role in the union, continuing to work as an organiser and as a key member of the union executive and

important Norfolk county structure. **67.** In February 1914, Edwards visited Shropshire, probably for the first time, and in the Lion public house at Bomere Heath he : ' gave an address explaining why labourers should join the above union and the benefits they would obtain by doing so. At the close several enrolled themselves as members of the union.' **68.**

The rest of this section will describe the growth of the NUAW, which saw itself as the only union which ' catered for agricultural labourers ' in Shropshire. It follows the chronology of this development and tries to estimate the numbers of members involved from figures which are available intermittently until 1921. After this, an attempt has been made to estimate Shropshire membership through the indirect use of other evidence and by following established national trends found by other historians.

The first mention of the county in the minutes of the union occur before Edwards' appearance in June 1912. R.B. Walker (see Photograph 6), the recently appointed general secretary, reported : ' I have had pathetic appeals from the following counties viz - Shropshire, Flintshire, Lancashire, Hertfordshire and Sussex.' Although the executive committee put its greatest effort into organising apparently more profitable areas like Lancashire, some branches started to appear in Shropshire. The 1913 **Annual Report** listed eight branches, with others mentioned in the EC minutes before the outbreak of war. **69.** This organising work was supported by a TUC grant of £500, seen as an investment to prevent the undercutting of town wages. The NUAW recruited two organisers, James Lunnon and Tom Mackley, who were both to work at various times in Shropshire. Mackley, although responsible for seventeen counties, began to make an impact as early as May 1914. **70.**

Only the WU's county conference was reported in the local press in the spring of 1914, although it is likely that a similar NUAW conference took place, since a county conference in May 1915 was described as the second. **71.** It is also likely that the NUAW, rather than the WU, was responsible for a successful strike at Chirbury during the 1914 haysel. The **Shrewsbury Chronicle** reported: ' Somewhat serious labour trouble in the agricultural industry is threatened on the Shropshire/Montgomery border around Chirbury. Recent propaganda work by the Farm Labourers' Union has met with much success and as a result the labourers have formulated demands for increased wages and will strike on 1st July. The strike of course will come at hay harvest . . . farmers are antagonistic towards the men's demands, but the feeling was that something must be conceded.' **72.**

It may be that initially the NUAW suffered from the WU's difficulty of not being able to translate support for a local dispute into sustainable branches. So, according to W.T. Fielding, speaking soon after his appointment as NUAW county organiser in 1919, ' Before

the war there were not 500 members.' Yet this is contradicted by a detailed List of Members for 14th August 1914, which lists 23 branches within the county, with 1,149 members. In national terms, Shropshire had the second highest number of members after Norfolk (the powerhouse of the union, where its national headquarters was still based) and the third largest number of branches. Worcestershire, the second county in this category, had only 713 members. **73.**

The progress of the NUAW was overshadowed by the outbreak of war, and the energies of farmworkers, including the minority of union members, were taken up by it either by the contingencies of wartime agriculture, or by voluntary enlistment in the Kitchener battalions of the King's Shropshire Light Infantry (KSLI). **74.** Overall membership of the NUAW fell in a comparable way to that of the WU (See p.42) with different sources giving the following figures:

	1914	1915	1916	
Groves	9299	8141	7167	
Newby	4734	4145	3649	**75.**

By June 1915 there was a comparable drastic fall in Shropshire of around 50% to 512 members, although roughly the same number of branches continued to exist. Indeed, in numbers of branches, Shropshire compared very well, second only to Norfolk. By comparison, other counties which had organised well before the war were decimated, Somerset, for example, having only 68 members in four surviving branches. **76.** Paradoxically, although the wartime dislocation had a detrimental effect on the union's structure, the continuing price inflation, may have engendered a certain militancy among farmworkers. With many younger men in the forces, and farmers reluctant to take on women, older men found that their skills were at a premium. This may be another demonstration of the ' structural conflict ' conjectured by Howkins in his work on Norfolk, which produced informal local collective bargaining in the absence of the union. **77.**

The union, however, was not far behind. As early as December 1914 the union's EC complied with the Yorton branch's request to ' communicate with the Farmers' Union for that district re.securing an advance in wages.' Lack of progress led the EC to propose a Shropshire county conference to be attended by the union's leadership, with the ' same resolutions to appear on the agenda as those at the Norfolk Conference. A letter on similar lines to Norfolk, to be sent to the employers in Shropshire.' **78.** In better organised Norfolk, R.B. Walker, the socialist general secretary, had no compunction about calling for strike action. It took a backroom deal between George Edwards (who was pro - war) and the Earl

of Leicester, the Lord Lieutenant, to secure a moderate rise to 18 shillings for the Norfolk men, but even this did not prevent some strikes and a hunger for future wage rises. **79.** At the county conference on 27th March, 1915, 16 Shropshire branch delegates, meeting with Edwards, Walker and Tom Mackley, resolved ' an immediate advance in the present rate of wages.' Curiously, the conference was not reported in the local press, and details of wage settlements are scarce, but it is safe to assume that some increase was forthcoming, since the EC on 10th April endorsed Mackley's report on the conference, and ' resolved that no notices be tendered.' **80.**

Unusual evidence of the spread of militancy and possible union membership appeared in a recruiting advertisement for the 4th King's Shropshire Light Infantry (KSLI), a Territorial Army battalion, : ' You find it hard to make ends meet and some of you are thinking of striking in the hope of getting higher wages. But a steady, adequate and honourable wage is yours if you join H. M. Forces.' **81.** This militancy was not reported in the local press - surprisingly perhaps - as industrial disputes in other parts of the country were to be criticised as unpatriotic later in the war. However, the EC minutes do chronicle the development of the union for the rest of 1915. In particular : ' A movement re. Harvest has been commenced by the Ackleton, Coalport and Yorton branches and it was agreed to support same on the lines suggested by Mr. Mackley.' According to Green, other wage advances were given in the county. That harvest, Shropshire figured more than any other county in the EC's discussions, and it was decided to send the second national organiser west, ' since Mr. Lunnon it appeared could not do much in his own district, he should visit this county commencing work there on Wednesday 8th September.' **82.**

By the spring of 1916, Lunnon was preparing an offensive from the union's strongest branch at Lydbury North, in the south west, centred on the Lord Lieutenant, the Earl of Powis' Walcot estate, ' where apparently wages were lower than surrounding areas.' On 13th May the EC agreed that ' subject to everything being considered satisfactory by the President and General Secretary, Mr Lunnon be granted leave to tender notices at Lydbury North in a week's time.' **83.** The possibility of a wartime agricultural strike was covered calmly by the normally jingoistic **Shrewsbury Chronicle** : ' Agricultural labourers in the Lydbury North district have decided to come out on strike and have handed in their notices. They demand 23 shillings per week . . . A number of farmers have expressed their willingness to comply with the demands of the men, but a few farmers reject their proposals and unless these alter their views a wholesale strike of labourers will take place in the district.' Green reported : ' Some stiff fighting though, even up to the applications for ejectments had to be undergone before increases were obtained in this campaign. By October 25 shillings per week was common in this county.' **84.** However, the apparently growing strength of the labourers was

fragile. After harvest, T. H. Tong, sympathetic chairman of the Montgomery Rural Tribunal, complained of farmers ' actually discharging men for asking for 1 or 2 shillings more.' **85.** Despite being summoned to Norfolk to work on the harvest settlement there, Lunnon continued to be active amongst the Shropshire branches, and he may have instigated another strike at Coalport : ' Consideration was given to a movement at Coalport . . . and it was resolved to proceed on the usual lines.' **86.**

In April 1917, a year after the Lydbury North victory, Lunnon received permission ' to grant leave to tender notices at Ackleton if members receiving less than 25 shillings a week. Usual steps to be taken '. Ackleton, near Bridgnorth, was the second strongest county branch, and tactically, the timing of strike coincided with haysel, so important to Shropshire's livestock farming. **87.** By the corn harvest the EC gave its consent to extend the strike : ' In the Shropshire wages movement Mr Lunnon was granted power to tender notices if necessary.' At the same time it was reported to the Shropshire War Agricultural Committee : ' A large number of agricultural labourers in Shifnal and Bridgnorth had given in their notice to cease work on the 4th August unless an increase of 5s. a week was granted.' The Committee's attempts at mediation failed, but the arbitrators brought in by the Board of Agriculture settled the dispute in the union's favour, although Lunnon evidently undertook to ' refrain from all agitation in Shifnal, Bridgnorth and surrounding Districts '. The EC was pleased, approving strike pay and commenting : ' The Shropshire setlement was also endorsed with thanks to Mr Lunnon.' **88.**

Help for the growing union also sprang from other sources. In December 1916 the EC approved a ' system of transfer between the NUR and ourselves . . . such members would become entitled to immediate benefits ', and the following year the first joint meetings were held between the two unions, which were to become an important plank of the local labour movement and recognised the shared origin of their members from amongst the rural poor. **89.** In addition ex-service organisations were being formed, which were making common cause with trade unions (see pp. 127 - 129). With their help, from the middle of the war, the NUAW was growing and despite only probably involving a minority of Shropshire farmworkers, by its actions showed itself as remarkably aggressive. By October 1917 an ' explosion of movements in Shropshire ' was reported to the EC, with enthusiastic branches such as Coalport urging that Lunnon should ' contest the Newport Division at the next Election.' **90.**

Despite the friction with the WU in Shropshire (see pp.79 - 80), the NUAW continued to grow in the last year of the war. At a meeting in Oswestry in May 1918, W. H. Drinkwater, Labour party organiser : ' Said that 27 branches of the Agricultural Labourers' Union had been formed in the county, and he urged upon them the necessity of forming a Divisional Labour Party.' **91.** During the subsequent general election campaign, A. Taylor, the Labour candidate for Shrewsbury, supported the union's demand for 42 shillings a week, and by the end of the year the NUAW was claiming 70 branches. **92.**

In the spring of 1919 Mackley reported to the EC that local branches were intending to hold a county conference. However central control prevailed as, the EC ' Resolved that the Committee disapprove of this conference being called on a branch delegation basis, and that in future matters of this kind be submitted for approval or otherwise to the Committee beforehand.' **93.** As national membership boomed, the organisers were redeployed. Lunnon moved south to prepare for the union's acquisition of its first London headquarters, and Mackley was promoted to an additional national organiser. W. T. Fielding, a Rotherham councillor and former railwayman, who had been appointed as NUAW organiser for four north Midland counties in December 1917, was sent to Shropshire. After his appearance at the May Day celebrations in Shrewsbury in May 1919, he was to be the centre of NUAW activity in the county until his retirement twenty years later. **94.**

He soon proved himself as capable and as ruthless as Lunnon in using strike action if the circumstances favoured his members. A serious ' dispute with the wages for the hay and corn harvests ' on the Shropshire/Staffordshire border, involving perhaps 600 men, soon took up the energies of all three organisers. It was settled favourably by Fielding after a five hour meeeting with the Farmers' Union at Wem. **95.** However, the dispute rumbled along on the Staffordshire border, where a mass meeting at Gnosall demanded £3 for a 48 hour week, not the 38 shillings on offer. The strike was not showing signs of going the union's way, in the face of well organised NFU support and the EC decided at this ' acute stage to send down Mr Lunnon to meet delegates from each of the 40 branches.' The farmers refused to meet the men and managed to get in their harvest, in spite of some violent incidents, possibly with the help of the WU (see pp.83). **96.** Local mass meetings heard protests of support from railwaymen's leaders, and brave rhetoric from James Lunnon, but in private the EC agreed that the battle was lost, and on 19th September 1919, ' decided to close down the strike as soon as possible with dignity to the union and members involved.' **97.** A core of members continued to be locked out in Gnosall, and a meeting held at Newport, coinciding with the brief and successful national railway strike, expressed support, and made a distress collection. Both Lunnon and Fielding put a brave face on the defeat, stressing the national growth of the NUAW. However, the EC ' agreed that the decision to strike was a mistaken

one.', which showed that the NUAW's aggressive tactics could only work if the timing of a dispute was exactly right. **98.**

That September (1919) Fielding was interviewed by F. E. Green for his forthcoming book, and could review remarkable progress : ' It was not until the last two or three years that the spirit of combination began to take hold of the workers. . . 76 branches have been started with 4,000 members.' This coincides almost exactly with the 77 Shropshire branches listed in the union's annual report for the end of the year. **99.** Fielding urged the EC to hold a county meeting to maintain momentum and on 19th December was authorised to attend a Shropshire county conference to be held early in the new year, when 47 delegates were expected. In the event, the meeting at Shrewsbury Labour Hall, which heard R. B. Walker : ' in a rousing, eloquent and inspiring discourse explain that the union had now 250,000 members ', consisted of representatives of 80 branches. The membership of 5,000 claimed from this does not seem unrealistic and so the meeting would appear to mark the high tide of the NUAW's growth. **100.**

The following month the union (along with the WU) was invited to submit four representatives to the Shropshire Chamber of Agriculture so that it ' represented all classes connected with agriculture.' **101.** This conciliatory position by the farmers, amounted to a remarkable turn around and in direct contrast to the hostile position evident just a few years before when the NFU refused to deal with the unions. It was also reflected in a speech by Captain W. G. A. Ormesby-Gore to the Market Drayton Farmers' Union : ' The Farmers' Union should try to come to terms as far as possible with the Agricultural Labourers' Union, and they should not separate themselves into two definitely opposed camps . . . They should do everything they could do to make it possible that the farmer and the labourer worked together for the good of the industry.' **102.**

We can then conclude that the comparative strength of the union at this time reinforced this attitude on the part of some farmers. Speaking in Ludlow in May 1920, James Lunnon claimed ' 300,000 members in nearly 3,000 branches.' The meeting was under the joint auspices of the NUR and the NUAW in Shropshire and Herefordshire. A resolution was passed to support national EC policy to ' secure a £3 per week minimum wage and (the meeting) pledges itself to back up and support any action our union thinks necessary to obtain that demand.' **103.**

Only 46 shillings was on offer from the Shropshire Agricultural Wages Board, and the following month the union organised a ballot asking members to withdraw their labour unless £2 10s. was forthcoming. Although this was supported by 95% of those voting, action was

delayed until a conference could be arranged with the Shropshire Farmers' Union and the WU. A joint conference in July, with the Staffordshire NUAW, demonstrated a similar caution, with many mindful of the failure of the Gnosall strike a year earlier, and the lack of success of a current strike in Cheshire. Indeed, this meeting demonstrated the fragility of the union's membership. Even Fielding admitted that ' Owing to the continual downpour of rain, this mass meeting at Newport was not as numerous as would otherwise be the case . . . 1,000 members from all parts of the district would have been there that night.' **104.**

The agricultural boom, which had started in the middle of the war, and had been maintained into peacetime, began to show signs of faltering. By September 1920, the view of the county NFU was that ' the demand could not be conceded without a diminution of employment . . . discharges are taking place which are directly attributable to higher labour costs.' This concern was shared by the NUAW county committee, organised for the first time into delegations from the district committees. C. Edwards, the county secretary, reported : ' Many farmers had recently begun to dismiss members, the reason given by some being the present wage of 46s. per week which farmers say is more than the industry can afford to pay.' Although a ' long discussion ' resulted, no action was forthcoming. **105.**

Farm prices were beginning to fall, and farmers were wanting to cut the cost of their labour. The hard won NUAW membership began to fall through these redundancies, which may well have fallen disportionately on the union activists. The union was then seen, particularly by half hearted or non - members, to be unable to do anything about it, which continued a downward spiral. Writing that autumn, F.E. Green could conclude : ' We may reckon that more than half of the agricultural labourers in England and Wales are now organised industrially.' Green's statistics were based on figures produced earlier in the year, and the situation in Shropshire was bleaker by the end of 1920. Although the number of branches was relatively stable at 71, membership was less than 3,000, a drop of perhaps 40% on the position twelve months earlier. **106.**

Despite the downturn, Fielding clearly worked hard to maintain membership. During the winter ' Many branches are busy catering for the social side by arranging social evenings, smoking concerts etc. with the further object of drawing members together.' A programme of outdoor events took place, which between April and August included eleven demonstrations and 60 branch meetings, suggesting at least 60 branches were active. According to Fielding : ' All over Shropshire the farmworkers are determined to hold tight to the union, and all the benefits won by and through the union '. A members' resolution asked Fielding ' to accept our best thanks and congratulations on the splendid work accomplished '. But this was to be an over optimistic view. **107.**

The county Conciliation Committee had replaced the Agricultural Wages Board during the year and its decision in December 1921 substantiated Fielding's confidence in the strength of the Shropshire membership. In national terms the Shropshire settlement of 38 shillings compared well, with even Norfolk only managing 36 shillings. However, with falling prices, the Conciliation Committee, at the request of the employers, began to meet monthly, and in January 1922, a settlement of 34 shillings was imposed after a period of deadlock. Furthermore, although a 48 hour week was still guaranteed, wages were now expressed on an hourly basis, implying a future return to the old ' wet weather' system, which had disappeared with the war time labour shortage. **108.**

Again, Fielding put a brave front on a serious situation, applauding a ' splendid rearguard action to retain the 50 and 48 hour week with the half holiday ', in the face of ' all kinds of methods and tactics the farmers use to discourage our members '. The summer programme he announced included ' five large demonstrations with the new county banner, and 40 open air meetings.' **109.** (This is a development that is likely to indicate a decrease in county branches). But the ' rearguard action ' could not prevent the tumbling of wages, as even the union organisers received a 10% reduction in April. Despite ' crowded meetings ' that summer, after harvest, members were faced with a reduction of 15s. 9d. over the previous year, to a level of 31s. 6d. **110.** The sense of frustration of union activists comes over in a resolution from the militant Shifnal branch : ' Instruct our members on the County Committee either to secure an increase of wages and the retention of the 48 hour week, or else to make no agreement whatever, as we cannot allow the union to be responsible for further reductions of wages.' **111.**

Fielding worked harder than ever, addressing 86 meetings in three months (virtually one a day), but neither he, nor the NUAW county committee, could prevent wages falling again to 7d. per hour in the Conciliation Committee agreement on 1st November, 1922. The only solution proposed by the union's County Committee was a resolution ' urging the EC to launch a great national agitation to rouse up the resisting power of all land workers to any further wage cuts.' This was clearly unrealistic if the union could not appeal to a majority of farmworkers when the economic circumstances were running in its favour. Speaking at a joint NUR meeting at Craven Arms just before Christmas, Fielding said, ' No wage earner was safe outside his union '. **112.** However to many Shropshire farmworkers, the union's protection was seen to be non - existent and faced with a desperate financial situation, many chose to save their meagre contributions. No figures on local membership losses are available, but both Groves and Newby suggest a drop of over 50% nationally during 1922, and there is no reason to suggest that Shropshire was immune. **113.**

The crisis came to a head in the spring of 1923, when a further wage reduction to 30 shillings a week was accepted by the WU, but rejected by the NUAW, and this led to an unsuccessful strike. Undermined by their rivals and largely ignored by their national leadership, concerned with the the larger and winnable dispute in Norfolk, the NUAW strikers, probably only a few hundred, were in limbo for several weeks, before being forced back to work on the original humiliating terms. **114.** Fielding, who had handled the strike strictly according to the union rule book, came out of the debacle with a surprising degree of authority. His criticism of the WU restated the moral supremacy of his union : ' The NUAW have members in every part of the county, and can claim to represent farmworkers in every sense of the word.' In the same way that the larger Norfolk dispute was claimed as a victory, by preserving a line below which wages were not to fall in future, so Fielding, by supporting members who went on strike, and giving help to the few still locked out in June, seems to have stabilised membership. The union could so easily have fallen apart, which is exactly what was to happen to the WU in many of their rural areas of the county. **115.**

The strikes nearly bankrupted the NUAW and staff cuts meant that Fielding had to take on a wider geographical area. Despite this, his reports for the summer of 1923 were genuinely positive : ' Many who left us in the first shock of the employers' attacks are now ready to return, and we are arranging scores of outdoor meetings' and his ' rousing and inspiring addresses . . . were received by hundreds of workers and their wives with the greatest enthusiasm.' **116.** Fielding claimed to have held outdoor meetings every Sunday, and reactivated branches so that ' Many of those who left the union are now returning.' **117.** In Shropshire, 1924 did not start auspiciously, with an outbreak of Foot and Mouth disease, following which Fielding wrote to the General Secretary to seek ' compensation to members who had lost their employment '. Nationally, 440 branches were reported not to have remitted in the previous twelve months. **118.**

The Shropshire membership level is conjectural. Fielding's pieces in **The Landworker** reported ' fine attendances at branch meetings' , and the union's ability to maintain the 1923 wage agreement, with only a marginal reduction in harvest rates, may indicate that members were retained. **119.** The usual summer rallies were held (See pp.99 - 101), and for the first time a visit from the General Secretary became an annual event. **120.** In October the re-constituted Shropshire Agricultural Wages Board had a clear majority (6 out of 8) of NUAW members on the workers' side. However, this may indicate the relative weakness of the WU outside Shrewsbury, rather than the ability of the NUAW to retain county-wide support. **121.** The 1925 yearly wage settlement saw a slight rise to 31s. 6d., although not the 36s. proposed by both unions. **122.** The Labour Party and the TUC organised national rural campaigns to

encourage trades unionism, explain their land policies and organise their potential votes in the countryside (See p.88). The summer TUC campaign was particularly successful in Shropshire, with the attendance of the NUAW General Secretary, whose ' vigorous and rousing speeches (made). . . every non-member join up '. So many meetings were being held after harvest, that the **Shrewsbury Chronicle** briefly introduced a regular NUAW column. **123.** The union's ability to secure another rise of 1 shilling a week in January 1926, probably flowed from this consolidation of membership. A series of Shropshire victimisation and eviction cases throughout 1926 a unique county phenomenon, also may indicate that numbers were on the rise. **124.** The joint Labour Party/TUC campaign was repeated again, although less successfully. The NUAW recruited nationally 1,568 members, compared to 3,426 in 1925, indicating perhaps that the campaign had only attracted farmworkers who had previously been union members, rather than new recruits. **125.**

In the new year of 1927, the opening of the Allscott sugar beet factory, with its stable government contract, is often seen as the turning point in prosperity for Shropshire farming (See p.146) **126.** R. B. Walker paid his last visit to the county in April 1927 to address a conference attended by delegates of 60 branches held at the Working Man's Hall in Shrewsbury. Walker's speech stressed the positive national position of the union, growing at 1,000 new members a week and Fielding could be well satisfied with his contribution. **127.** His post-harvest round of meetings went into territory previously associated with the WU, and at the first County Committee meeting of 1928 he claimed an increase of 400 members over the previous twelve months. **128.**

Later in 1928 Walker was forced to resign and Fielding stood in the subsequent election for a successor. He came second out of six candidates, although he secured less than 10% of the votes which secured the appointment. Considering that Fielding was not a member of the EC and only known as a district organiser, it may be speculated that his 1,460 votes provides some indication of the size of union membership in the Shropshire area. **129.** Fielding returned to the usual round of autumn meetings. With a General Election imminent, he received a request from the Oswestry Divisional Labour Party for the union to put forward a candidate, as it had done so successfully in Norfolk. **130.** Although Labour won the 1929 election, with The Wrekin returning a Labour M.P., the NUAW was disappointed with the lack of progress in extending National Insurance to farmworkers, which would no doubt have increased membership. **131.**

Instead, at the end of the decade, Fielding patiently undertook the yearly grind of meetings with occasional appearances from head office. His experience, personal standing and energy held together the union in Shropshire, despite his increased responsibility for ' eight counties '. **132.** In 1930, Shropshire became a union district again, in its own right. In the

view of ' An old Trade Unionist ' : ' They have secured from the Wages Council rates which having regard to the state of the industry, are highly favourable and cannot go further in this direction.' **133.** The fact that Fielding could achieve this with minimal support speaks highly of his abilities. A secretaries' conference in Shrewsbury in March 1931 could only muster delegates from 32 branches, and this tallies with a later estimate for 1931 of ' just over 40 branches with an income of well under £1,000 '. The monthly contribution of 1s. 3d. would give around 1,300 members. **134.** However, he was hamstrung by the brutal situation frankly defined by Walker in 1927; ' Since the war many of those who came in have fallen out . . . only one in ten men on farms is a member of a union'. **135.** A systematic trawl of the local press and **The Landworker** has revealed 105 NUAW branches in existence in Shropshire at one time or another between 1913 and 1930, which could easily indicate over ten thousand farmworkers passing through the union's ranks. But retaining members in a rural environment is the perpetual problem, and at the end of our period, trades unionism was still a minority activity for farmworkers in Shropshire.

Conclusion

The growth of agricultural trades unionism in Shropshire, in terms of numbers of branches and overall membership, follows a similar pattern observed by other historians nationally and in other counties, including with slight variations the Norfolk homeland of the NUAW. Whilst exact figures are not always available, the following seems to be an accurate description of developments in Shropshire. This consists of a modest start around 1912, possibly earlier in the case of the WU, followed by a brisk growth in early 1914, with a sharp downturn as the economic dislocation caused by the outbreak of war took effect. From the middle of 1916, the NUAW experienced a recovery, which was parallelled by the WU a few months later, and the growth of both unions accelerated. This growth spurt grew as the war ended, with the agriculture still relatively prosperous, and with the return of ex - servicemen who saw the unions as securing their ' homes fit for heroes'.

The NUAW grew slightly faster, and had many more members than the WU. With the fall in agricultural prices in 1920 - 21, both unions began to contract, with the WU suffering the larger percentage loss. This sustained decline was checked by a slight improvement in 1924, possibly affected by the NUAW's decision to strike in 1923. However although the NUAW was able to maintain a marked and resilient presence within the county, the WU continued to retreat to a few industrial branches in the eastern coalfield, and would have disappeared entirely if it had not been saved from bankruptcy by the TGWU.

By the end of our period the Shropshire NUAW had declined in importance within the union compared with other counties. In 1914 it was the most important county outside Norfolk and its local post - war strength meant that this position was maintained certainly until 1920 and possibly later. By 1958, the only date for which figures are available, Shropshire had slipped to the eighth most important county for the NUAW, still perhaps an impressive performance.

136. Some WU agricultural membership survived within its ' mixed ' TGWU branches, but John Beard's dream of extending his union to his home district was a resounding failure. Instead the complex relationship between the two unions led to rivalry and conflict, often in small localities, postures which weakened them both.

1. Groves op.cit. Part Two Chapter V, George R.Boyer and Timothy J.Hatton **Did Joseph Arch raise Agricultural Wages ? - Rural Trade Unions and the Labour market in late 19thc. England** Economic History Review 47 (2) May 1994 pp.114 - 127.
2. For Strange's union see Groves op.cit. p.66, Green op.cit. p.66, Horn op.cit. p.19 - 20, Sidney and Beatrice Webb **The History of Trades Unionism 1666 - 1920** (1920) p.328 and **Eddowe's Shropshire Journal** 12.12.1871 and 20.12.1871.
3. Ibid 10.1.1872, 7.2.1872, 6.3.1872 and 13.3.1872.
4. Ibid 20.12.1871.
5. Ibid. 8.5.1872 and 5.6.1872.
6. Ibid 18.9.1872 and 25.9.1872, and J.P.D. Dunbabin **The Organisation of Agricultural Trades Unionism in the 1870s** Agricultural History Review Vol 5. (1968) pp.114 - 117.
7. **Eddowe's Shropshire Journal** 25.9.1872, 4.12.1872, and **Royal Commission on Agriculture Minutes of Evidence Taken Before H.M. Commissioners of Agriculture** (1880) Vol.2 p.347. Dunbabin loc.cit. p.127, cites a West of England meeting at Staunton, Glos ' a district suitable since the many O' Connor allotments there made the labourers independent of farmers.'
8. For modern interpretations of the ' federals ' (Groves just recorded them as part of the ' great movement ') see Howkins op.cit. Chapter 5. and Helen Allinson **Alfred Simmons, Friend of the Farmworker** (1989). For the NALU information interview Ivan Monckton TGWU, Presteigne 21.6.93, Green op.cit. p.276, Dunbabin loc.cit. p.117 and Andrew Charlesworth (ed.) **An Atlas of Rural Protest in Britain 1548 - 1900** (1983) p.172
9. **Eddowe's Shropshire Journal** 27.3.1872 and 13.3.1872, and Dunbabin loc.cit. p.117. The figure of 30,000, according to Horn op.cit. p.19, originated with Arch, but it is repeated by Selley op.cit. p.36, Green op.cit.p.25, and as late as the 1980s (see p.3)
10. Green op.cit .p.114 - 115.
11. See John Beard **My Shropshire Days on Common Ways** (1948). Other examples are George Edwards (see pp.44 - 45), and Jack Bromley, General Secretary of ASLEF between

1914 and 1936, who was from Hadnall, a ' sandstone village ' north of Shrewsbury which later had a strong NUAW branch. The village lads with the most successful careers in the labour movement were Ernest Bevin and James Ramsay MacDonald.

12. See Beard's articles Early Struggles of the Union in WU **Record** June, July, and August 1919, and July 1920, also Green op.cit. p.143.

13. Beard loc.cit. and Hyman op.cit. p.142.

14. Ibid.p.45 and Green op.cit. p.142.

15. Beard loc.cit. July 1920.

16. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 3.4.03, WU **Record** July 1929, **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 23.1.20 and WU **Record** July 1920, repeated by Hyman op.cit. p.47.

17. TUC **Annual Report** 1918 p.102.

18. Hyman. op.cit.pp. 35 - 37. The phrase was also used by Jack Jones, ex - General Secretary TGWU, who knew Beard, in an interview with author, 19.11.93.

19. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 15.1.26.

20. TUC **Annual Report** 1924 p.430 and **Annual Report** 1925 p.551.(According to Madden op.cit. p.25, the NUAW had taken this line as early as 1909.)

21. See Howkins op.cit. p.167 and Roy Brazier **The Empty Fields, the Agricultural Strike of 1914** (1988) p.42.

22. Hyman.op.cit.pp.51 - 52.

23. Interview with Arnold Ecclestone, District Officer TGWU, Wellington, 29.5.92 and WU **Record** July 1914.

24. WU **Annual Report** 1913.

25. Hyman op.cit.pp.46 - 47, Green op.cit. pp.227 - 228, Scotland op.cit. **Gloucestershire** p.75 and Malcolm Wanklyn **Border Agriculture and Agrarian Society** (unpublished paper) p.11.

26. Hyman op.cit.p.37.

27. WU **Record** November 1913 and January 1914 and WU **Annual Report** 1914.

28. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 20.3.14, WU **Record** April 1914 and see biography of W.H.Edwards in WU **Record**. May 1924.

29. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 20.3.14 and 10.4.14. See also SRO 4531/2 Minutes of Special Meeting Shropshire NFU 28.3.14.

30. Ken Coates and Tony Topham **History of the TGWU** Vol.1 (1991) p.390. See Groves op.cit. pp.136 - 151 and Brazier op.cit.

31. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 8.5.14.

32. WU **Record.** July 1914. For further on the Whixall turf diggers see **Shropshire Within Living Memory** (hereafter SWLM) (1992) p.176 and Caroline Hillier **A Journey to the Heart of England** (1986) pp.229 - 230.

33. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 12.6.14. See SRO 4531/2 EC Minutes of the Shropshire NFU for a similar confusion as late as 9.3.15.

34. WU **Annual Reports** 1914 and 1915.

35. WU **Record** May 1915, quoting Sydney Box.

36. Ibid September 1914 and Hyman op.cit. p.82.

37. WU **Annual Report** 1915.

38. WU **Record** May 1924 (Biography of W.H.Edwards), and Ibid. September 1915.

39. WU **Annual Report** 1916, WU **Record** October 1915 and November 1916.

40. Hyman op.cit. p.101.

41. Ibid.p.100 and Newby op.cit. p.217. See also Dallas' entry (by his son Kenneth Dallas) in John Saville and Joyce Bellamy (eds.) **The Dictionary of Labour Biography** Vol.III (1977) p. 69.

42. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 18.2.16, 3.3.16, 4.1.18 and 15.2.18.

43. Hyman op.cit. p.101.

44. WU **Record** March and April 1918.

45. Ibid May 1924 (W.H.Edwards biography) and **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 2.8.18.

46. WU **Annual Reports** 1918 and 1919.

47. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 4.4.1918.

48. Ibid 25.7.18 and 26.9.18.

49. WU **Annual Report** 1919, WU **Record** June, July, August and September 1919.

50. SRO 4531/4 Shropshire NFU EC Minutes 24.5.19. Of twelve only two, William Fielding and R.Thomas, the county secretary, were definitely from the NUAW. The affiliation of five members is unknown, although it seems likely that the twelve were split evenly between the WU and the NUAW.

51. Hyman op.cit. p.127 and Green op.cit. p.322.

52. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 9.1.20.

53. Ibid 16.1.20 and 11.6.20. (Both organisations joined the British Legion in 1921 - see p.131)

54. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 27.1.20 and 12.11.20.

55. Ibid. 19.8.21 and 9.9.21.

56. Ibid. 27.1.22 and 10.2.22.

57. Ibid. 22.9.22, **The Landworker** September and October 1922.

58. Hyman op.cit.p.148 and WU **Annual Reports** 1923 and 1924.

59. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 23.2.23, 2.3.23, 30.3.23, 11.5.23, 19.10.23 and 26.10.23.

60. Ibid. 22.2.24, WU **Annual Reports** 1925 and 1926 and **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 24.10.24.

61. Ibid. 4.9.25, 30.10.23 and TUC **Annual Report** 1926 pp.155 - 156.

62. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 10.9.26, 14.9.28, 24.5.29 and 25.10.29.

63. Ibid. 26.8.27.

64. WU **Annual Report** 1928, Hyman op.cit. pp.148 and 152. Hyman's claim that the TGWU retained 13,000 farmworkers as late as 1965, may also support the view that the WU in 1929 retained a considerable agricultural ' rump '.

65. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 24.10.30, SRO Wrekin Labour Party Minutes 1931 - 36 List of Delegates and interview Arnold Ecclestone TGWU 29.5.92. Beard suffered from diabetes, see correspondence with his son in Hyman papers (Modern Records Centre MSS. 51). For a comparable bankruptcy facing the Irish TGWU see Emmet O'Connor **Agrarian Unrest and the Labour Movement in Co.Waterford 1917 - 1923** Soathar 1980 p.54.

66. For Edwards and the early union see Edwards op.cit., Groves op.cit. and Howkins op.cit.

67. Ibid Chapters 5 and 6, Edwards op.cit. Chapter 14. Also see Howkins loc.cit.

68. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 13.2.14. Bomere Heath also possesses an independent chapel dating from 1822, possibly indicating a rare Shropshire connection between nonconformity and the unions.

69. TUC **Annual Report** 1918 and NUAW Records (Institute of Agricultural History, Reading Univesity) EC minutes 15.6.12. For Lancashire, see Mutch op.cit.pp. 56 - 58 and Groves op.cit. pp.140 - 142. (Lancashire split from the NUAW, and formed its own Farm and Dairy Workers Union, which eventually joined the WU). NUAW Records, AWU 195. Annual Report and Balance Sheet 1913, EC Minutes 28.2.14, 18.4.14 and 30.5.14.

70. TUC **Annual Report** 1913, Groves op.cit.p.131, NUAW Records EC Minutes 28.2.14 and 9.5.14.

71. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 20.3.14. For the 1915 Conference see NUAW Records B VI 2.

72. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 2.6.14.

73. Green op.cit.p.277 and NUAW Records B VIII 2.

74. Nick Mansfield **Class Conflict and Village War Memorials, 1914 - 24** Rural History (1995) **6** 1 pp.69 -71.

75. Groves op.cit. p.254 and Newby op.cit. p.228. F.D.Mills **The National Union of Agricultural Workers** Ph.D Reading University (1965) p.19, gives even higher figures than Groves.

76. NUAW Records BVIII 3 List of Members at 30th. June 1915.

77. Howkins op.cit. Chapter 2.

78. NUAW Records EC Minutes 5.12.14, 9.1.15, and 20.2.15. The union was still having difficulty in adapting to its national role and away from its centralised Norfolk mind set.

79. Howkins op.cit. pp.117 - 118 and Edwards op.cit. pp.194 - 195.

80. NUAW Records EC Minutes 10.4.15.

81. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 9.4.15 and 16.4.15.

82. For a comparison with a group of industrial workers see A. Mor O' Brien **Patriotism on Trial : The Strike of the South Wales Miners, July 1915** Welsh History Review 12 1984. NUAW Records EC Minutes 1.6.15, 4.8.15 and 28.8.15. Green op.cit. p.241.

83. Ibid p.246. For the strength of the Lydbury North branch see NUAW Records B V III Membership Lists 2, 3, and 4, EC Minutes 27.4.16 and 13.5.16.

84. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 2.6.16 and Green op.cit.p.246.

85. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 29.6.16.

86. NUAW Records EC Minutes 23.12.16.

87. Ibid 28.4.17, B V III Membership lists 2, 3, and 4.

88. EC Minutes 28.7.17, 18.8.17 and strike pay was approved for unnamed Shropshire locations on 15.9.17. See the discussion of the dispute in the Shropshire War Agricultural Committee Minutes SRO SC 51/1A1/1 31.7.17, 7.8.17 and 21.8.17.

89. NUAW Records EC Minutes 28.12.16.

90. Ibid 18.8.17 and 6.10.17. **The Labourer** January 1918.

91. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 17.5.18.

92. Ibid 29.11.18 and NUAW Records AWU 193 Annual Report 1918.

93. NUAW Records EC Minutes 22.3.19.

94. Ibid. 11.12.17 and 25.7.19. Groves op.cit. p.245 and Newby op.cit. p.228. **Shrewbury Chronicle** 9.5.19.

95. Ibid. 2.6.19 and 18.7.19.

96. Ibid. 25.7.19 and 12.9.19. NUAW Records EC Minutes 29.8.19.

97. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 26.7.19 and NUAW Records EC Minutes 19.9.19.

98. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 3.10.19 and NUAW Records EC Minutes 10.11.19.

99. Green op.cit.pp.276 - 277. NUAW Records AWU 194 13th. Annual Report 1919 - 20.

100. NUAW Records EC Minutes 10.11.19 and 19.12.19. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 23.1.20.

101. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 6.2.20.

102. Ibid. Ormesby - Gore was the son of Lord Harlech, who owned large estates near Oswestry, and was involved in the Comrades of the Great War (See p.129)

103. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 21.5.20.

104. Ibid. 23.7.20 and 30.7.20. See 16.7.20 for the Cheshire strike.

105. Ibid. 24.9.20 and 15.10.20.

106. Edith Whetham **The Agricultural History of England and Wales** Vol. VIII 1914 - 1939 p.142 (1978), Green op.cit.p.323 and NUAW Records B VIII 4 List of members 31.12.20.

107. **The Landworker** April, May and July 1921.

108. Ibid. December 1921 and January 1922. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 30.12.21 and 10.2.22. Wages dropped from 8d. an hour to 7 1/2 d. Under the old system day workers were laid off without pay when the weather was so inclement that work was prevented.

109. **The Landworker** February and June 1922.

110. NUAW Records EC Minutes 28.4.22, **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 8.9.22 and 22.9.22.

111. **The Landworker** October 1922.

112. Ibid. November 1922. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 8.9.22 and 22.12.22.

113.

	Newby (p. 228)	Groves (p. 245)
1921	79, 067	103, 526
1922	35, 663	46, 695.

114. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 2.3.23, 30.3.20 and 11.5.23. **The Landworker** March, April and May 1923.

115. Howkins op.cit.p.176 and **Wellington Journal** 24.3.23.

116. NUAW Records EC Minutes 21.6.23 and 28.8.23. **The Landworker** June 1923.

117. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 22.6.23.

118. **The Landworker** December 1923. NUAW Records EC Minutes 21.2.24 and 20.2.24.

119. **The Landworker** February 1924 and **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 29.2.24.

120. Ibid. 20.6.24 and **The Landworker** August 1924.

121. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 10.1.24.

122. Ibid. 9.1.25.

123. **The Landworker** July 1925. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 25.9.25, 9.10.25 and 30.10.25.

124. **The Landworker** January 1927. NUAW Records EC Minutes 6.1.26, 10.2.26, 28.5.26, and 2.19.26.

125. TUC **Annual Report** pp. 155 - 156.

126. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 17.12.26, Stamper op.cit.p.70 and interview John Foster, (b. 1920) farmer of Bridgnorth, 17.7.95.

127. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 8.4.27.

128. Ibid 23.9.27 and 20.1.27.

129. NUAW Records EC Minutes 19.6.28 and 18.7.28. **The Landworker** August 1928.

130. **The Landworker** October and November 1928. NUAW Records EC Minutes 18.10.28.

131. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 18.10.29. See entry for Edith Picton - Turbervill in Saville and Bellamy op.cit. Vol.IV (1977) p.69. Groves op.cit. p.216.

132. See NUAW Records EC Minutes for this period, particularly 21.2.30, 18.7.30 and Political and Organising Committee 16.10.30.

133. In a letter to the **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 21.2.30.

134. Ibid. 7.3.31 and 21.3.58. The figure is calculated from NUAW contribution cards in the collection of the National Museum of Labour History. Groves op.cit.p.209.

135. Quoted in **Labour Magazine** August 1927.

136. **Shropshire Chronicle** 21.3.58.

Chapter 3 - The Geographical Distribution of Agricultural Trades Unionism in Shropshire 1900 - 1930

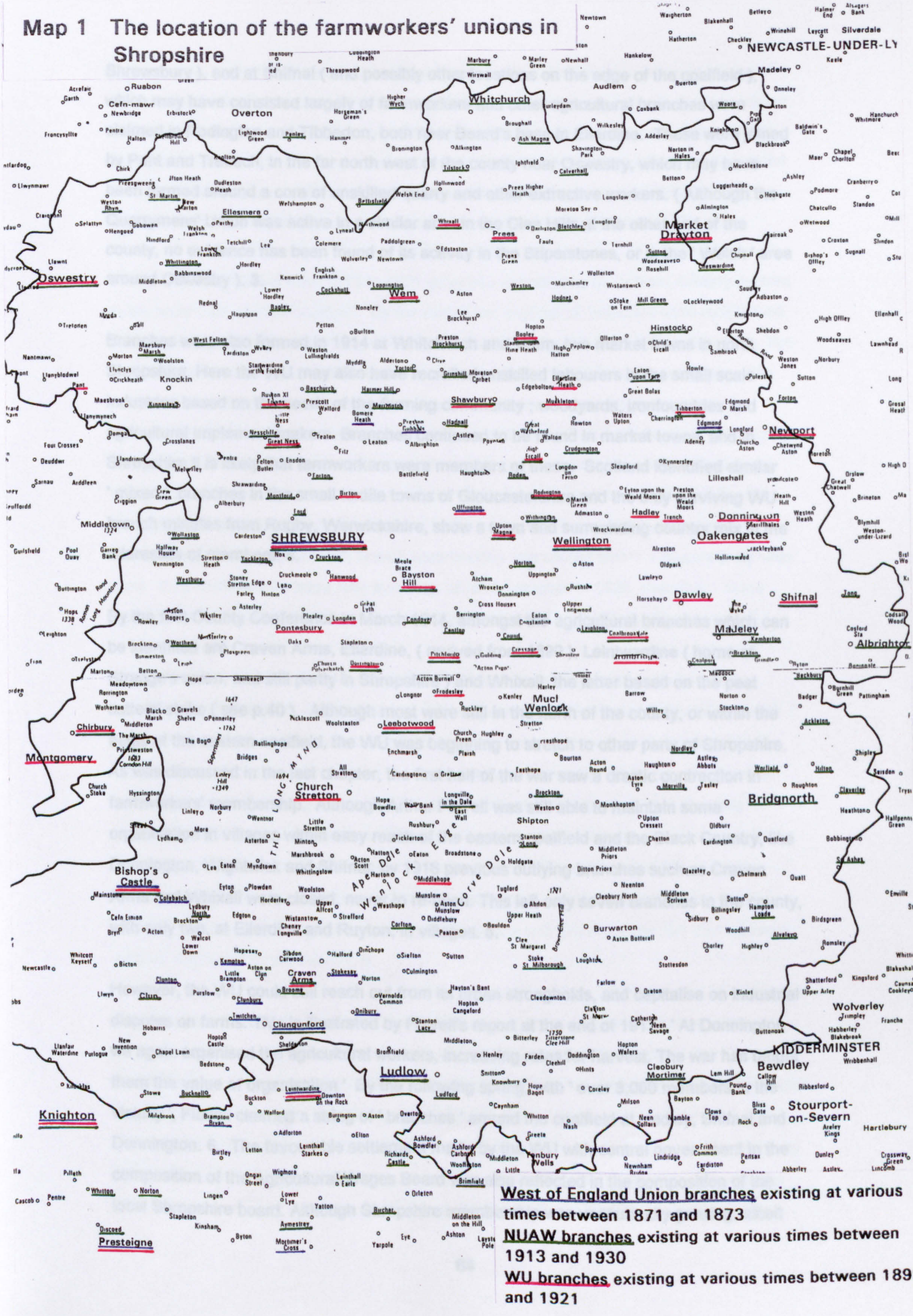
This chapter will describe the geographical distribution of agricultural trade union branches and activities in Shropshire and its borderlands between 1900 and 1930. It is based on surviving membership lists from **Annual Reports**, and from the local and union press. Although there is a complete run of WU **Annual Reports**, these do not include any numbers of members, and as previously discussed, their accuracy may be questioned. The NUAW annual returns and Lists of Members are very complete until 1920, and then because no **Annual Reports** have survived after this date, have to be constructed entirely from press reports. It has been found that although the available evidence is often sketchy, it is still possible to identify union strength and weakness in the county. Map 1 shows the location of all known NUAW and WU branches.

Part One - The geographical distribution of the Workers' Union

As we have seen (p.37), the WU branches formed at the turn of the century were based entirely in the north - east of the county. Aside from Beard's own village of Ellerdine, and John Simpson's home district around Market Drayton, the other branches of the union found in the nearby market towns of Whitchurch and Prees may account for the entire membership of 1,000 claimed at the time.**1.** Despite the initial setback at Ironbridge, there may have been farmworkers in the other branches in the east Shropshire coalfield, at Oakengates and Wellington, though perhaps not Dawley, which was entirely surrounded by industry. These branches certainly existed from 1905, and possibly dated from Beard's campaign. Beard himself took a personal interest in the WU in his native village, appearing in a rally there as late as 1925. (This in itself suggests well established roots; one cannot imagine Ernie Bevin addressing meetings in Somerset). Ironically, although Ellerdine later established satellite branches at nearby villages like Stanton, Muckleton, High Ercall and Tibberton, the NUAW was itself strong in north east Shropshire, with over two dozen branches in its post-war heyday. **2.**

Between 1905 and 1912, the WU presence in Shropshire consisted entirely of the three industrial outposts in the coalfield. These were joined by the Shrewsbury branch, due largely to W. H. Edwards' success in organising the builders' labourers of the town. In January, 1914, the Workers' Union **Record** published ' A Clarion Call from R. O. Hornagold ' : ' The agricultural labourers will remember it (1914) with gratitude as the year when the union sent its emissaries into the villages to lead them out of thraldom, poverty and degradation.' The results produced by the first national agricultural organiser were more mundane in Shropshire. New branches were created in Ruyton XI Towns (a large village north - west of

Map 1 The location of the farmworkers' unions in Shropshire


Oswestry
Whittington
Ellesmere
Wem
Whitchurch
Prees
Market Drayton
Newcastle-under-Ly
Madeley
Audlem
Hinstock
Newport
Shawbury
Wellington
Oakengates
Dawley
Shifnal
Donnington
Hadley
Lilleshall
Hodnet
Market Drayton
Middletown
SHREWSBURY
Pontesbury
Bayston Hill
Pontesbury
Chirbury
Montgomery
Bishop's Castle
Church Stretton
Leebotwood
Craven Arms
Clungunford
Ludlow
Knighton
Presteigne
Wenlock Edge
Corve Dale
Apedale
Mucl Wenlock
Much Wenlock
Shipton
Bridgnorth
Wolverley
KIDDERMINSTER
Bewdley
Cleobury Mortimer
Stourport-on-Severn
Albrighton
Codsall
Burwarton
Tenbury Wells
Knockin
Maesbury Marsh
West Felton
Llanymynech
Four Crosses
Middleton 1324
Hope 1338
Pontesbury
Leighton
Worthen
Brockton
Westbury
Hanwood
Cruckton
Yockleton
Nox
Wollaston
Halfway House
Vennington
Stretton Heath
Garreg Bank
Pool Quay
Guilsfield
Buttington
Llawnt
Babbinswood
Whittington
Middleton
Hordley
Lower Frankton
Welsh Frankton
Hindford
Selattyn
Gobowen
Hengoed
Weston Rhyn
Chirk
Llwynmawr
Ruabon
Acrefair
Garth
Cefn-mawr
Newbridge
Pentre
Froncysyllte
Halton
Chirk Bank
Erbistock
Overton
Lightwood Green
Penley
Hanmer
Horseman's Green
Threapwood
Ludlington Heath
Higher Wych
Bronington
Ash Magna
Broughall
Marbury
Wirswall
Marley Green
Newhall
Burleydam
Coxbank
Wilkesley
Adderley
Ightfield
Calverhall
Tilstock
Hollinwood
Prees Higher Heath
Bettisfield
Welsh End
Welshampton
Lyneal
Colemere
Paddolgreen
Edstaston
Wolverley
Newtown
Prees Green
Darliston
Bletchley
Fauls
Ternhill
Sutton
Woodseaves
Rosehill
Cheswardine
Chipnall
Norton in Hales
Mucklestone
Betton
Loggerheads
Hookgate
Almington
Hales
Longslow
Moreton Say
Longford
Tairoak
Wetwood
Croxton
Sugnall
Bishop's Offley
Standon
Chatcull
Podmore
Ashley
Cranberry
Maer
Chapel Chorlton
Baldwin's Gate
Knighton
Blackbrook
Hanchurch
Whitmore
Pipe Gate
Woore
Onneley
Betley
Wrinehill
Leycett
Silverdale
Keele
Checkley
Hatherton
Weigherton
Blakenhall
Halmer End
Alsagers Bank
Newtown
Hankelow
Norbury
Woodseaves
Lawnhead
Weston Jones
Sambrook
Howle
Eaton upon Tern
Great Bolas
Edgmond
Marsh
Tibberton
Cherrington
Edgmond
Longford
Church Aston
Adeney
Forton
Puleston
Sutton
Long
Grosal Heath
Chetwynd Aston
Waters Upton
Rowton
Great Wetherford
Walton
Crudgington
Sleapford
Kynnersley
Eyton upon the Weald Moors
Preston upon the Weald Moors
Marsh Green
Admaston
Withington
Upton Magna
Wrockwardine
Wrockwardine
Trench
Sheriffhales
Weston Heath
Blymhill
Weston-under-Lizard
Orslow
Great Chatwell
Brineton
Ma
High O
Bisl
We
K
Ellenhall
Lawnhead
Norbury
Woodseaves
Weston Jones
Sutton
Long
Grosal Heath
Forton
Newport
Chetwynd Aston
Horeton
Shipley
Sarsden
Tryst
Halfpenny Green
Bobbington
Six Ashes
Emville
St
Birdsgreen
Alveley
Romsley
Whitti
Blakeshal
Caunsa
Cookley
Shatterford
Kingsford
Upper Arley
Wolverley
Franche
Habberley
Blakebrook
Wribbenhall
Bewdley
Callow Hill
Ribbesford
Lem Hill
Cleobury Mortimer
Pound Bank
Bayton
Bliss Gate
Rock
Clows Top
Neen Sollars
Namble
Milson
Caynham
Whitton
Nash
Greete
Ashford Bowdler
Ashford Carbonell
Richards Castle
Tenbury Wells
Woofferton
Little
Middleton
Boraston
Lindridge
Newnham Bridge
Pensax
Eardiston
Frith Common
Dunley
Crossway Green
Lincomb
Abberley
Astley
Hartlebury
Stourport-on-Severn
Areley Kings
Bridgnorth
Quatford
Eardington
Chetton
Oldbury
Upton Cressett
Monkhopton
Morville
Tasley
Aston Eyre
Acton Round
Haughton
Astley Abbots
Norbury
Worfield
Hilton
Roughton
Claverley
Heathton
Shipton
Stanton Long
Middleton Priors
Ditton Priors
Glazeley
Chelmarsh
Quatt
Neenton
Cleobury North
Middleton Scriven
Sutton
Billingsley
Hampton Loade
Sidbury
Woodhill
Birdsgreen
Emville
St
Tasley
Aston Botterell
Burwarton
Farlow
Oreton
Kinlet
Cleedownton
Hopton Cangeford
Stoke St Milborough
Loughton
Stottesdon
Clee St Margaret
Clee Hill
Tugford
Ahton
Upper Heath
Bouldon
Peaton
Sibdon Carwood
Halford
Dinchope
Sidbury
Sutton
Culmington
Stokesay
Norton
Broome
Craven Arms
Little Brampton
Aston on Clun
Purslow
Clunton
Clun
Llwyn
Clunbury
Twitchen
Onibury
Vernolds Common
Stanton Lacy
Hopton Castle
Sheldon
Bromfield
Middleton
Bitterley
Henley
Farden
Cleehill
Oddington
Hopton Wafers
Hints
Snitton
Knowbury
Hope Bagot
Coreley
Milson
Bayton
Ludford
Ludlow
Leintwardine
Downton on the Rock
Buckton
Walford
Burrington
Aston
Overton
Elton
Adforton
Leinthall Starkes
Leinthall Earls
Lingen
Lower Lye
Yatton
Orleton
Burcher
Eye
Yarpole
Middleton on the Hill
Ashton
Layster Pole
Stapleton
Kinsham
Byton
Mortimer's Cross
Aymestrey
Presteigne
Discoed
Knighton
Stowe
Bucknell
Milebrook
Brampton Bryan
Llanfair Waterdine
Purlogue
New Invention
Chapel Lawn
Bedstone
Hopton Castle
Sheldon
Hobarris
Hyssington
Church Stone
Linley Hill 1349
Linley
Norbury
Wentnor
Lydham
More
Asterton
Minton
Little Stretton
Marshbrook
Lea Eaton
Myndtown
Whittingslow
Woolston
Horderley
Upper Affcot
Wistanstow
Cheney Longville
Edgton
Plowden
Eyton
Mainstone
Colebatch
Lydbury North
Brockton
Cein Einion
Bryn
Acton
Walcot
Lower Down
Hopesay
Kempton
Aston on Clun
Little Brampton
Sibdon Carwood
Halford
Dinchope
Sidbury
Sutton
Culmington
Stokesay
Norton
Broome
Craven Arms
Clunton
Clun
Llwyn
Purslow

Shrewsbury), and at Shifnal (and possibly other locations on the edge of the coalfield), which may have consisted largely of farmworkers and other agricultural branches were claimed in Rodington and Tibberton, both near Beard's base in Ellerdine. These were joined by Pant and Treflech, in the far north west of the county near Oswestry, which may have been formed around a core of unskilled quarry and other extractive workers. (Although the Quarrymens' Union was active in a similar area in the Clee Hills at the other end of the county, no evidence has been found of its activity in the Stiperstones, or in the ' Welsh ' area around Oswestry). **3.**

Branches were also formed in 1914 at Whitchurch and Wem, two market towns in north Shropshire. Here the WU may also have recruited unskilled labourers in the small scale industries based on the needs of the farming community ; woodyards, ironfoundries and agricultural implement makers. Branches continued to be found in market towns, and in Shropshire it is likely that farmworkers were members of these. Scotland identified similar ' mixed ' branches in the small textile towns of Gloucestershire and the only surviving WU branch minutes from Rugby, Warwickshire, show a town and surrounding country mix in the addresses of members. **4.**

By the first County Conference in March 1914, amongst the agricultural branches which can be identified are Craven Arms, Ellerdine, (revived from 1899), Leintwardine (home of Strange's union, and still partly in Shropshire) and Whixall, the latter based on the peat cutters' strike (see p.40). Although most were still in the north of the county, or within the aegis of the eastern coalfield, the WU was beginning to stretch to other parts of Shropshire. As was discussed in the last chapter, the first half of the war saw a drastic contraction in farmworkers' membership. Although Arthur Flavell was still able to maintain some organisation in villages within easy reach of the eastern coalfield and the Black Country, like Donnington, Wightwick and Shifnal, by 1916 previous outlying branches such as Craven Arms and Whixall were closed, never to re-open. This left only seven branches in the county, with only two, at Ellerdine and Ruyton, in villages. **5.**

However, the WU could still reach out from its urban strongholds, and capitalise on industrial disputes on farms. This is illustrated by Flavell's report at the end of 1917 : ' At Donnington we again organised the agricultural workers, increasing rates for harvest. The war has taught them the value of organisation.' By the following spring, with ' over 3,000 members in the vicinity ', Flavell claimed a string of ' branches ' around the coalfield at Hadley, Shifnal and Donnington. **6.** The favourable settlement made by the WU with central government in the composition of the Agricultural Wages Board was also reflected in the composition of the local Shropshire board. Although Shropshire membership was undoubtedly growing, albeit

patchily, from early 1918, its location is unknown, and the union's perennial problem of consolidating it into branches still existed. So **Annual Reports** only indicate a slow addition of new branches. One exception was in Montgomeryshire, where Lawrie was active in the spring and summer of 1918, and with the help of the NUR, founded several branches on the Shropshire border, which spilled over to villages like Chirbury, scene of a strike in 1914, probably making it the first place where both unions tried to set up branches. **7.**

The membership boom from 1918 to 1921 gave rise to branches away from existing centres in the north east and the coalfield. By the end of the expansion, branches were established, though often precariously, in many of the market towns in the northern half of the county like Oswestry, Market Drayton and Newport, and re-established in Whitchurch and Wem. The composition of these branches is likely to have been ' mixed ', with labourers in small industries (often ex-farmworkers themselves), as well as workers from farms in the vicinity. The second area of WU expansion was to the south and west of Shrewsbury. Large open villages like Bayston Hill, Hookagate and later Pontesbury, as well as smaller villages like Longden, had branches, probably serviced by Edwards, who was within easy reach in Shrewsbury. It seems likely that branch membership was spread over a comparatively wide area. A description of a large rally involving several branches in 1926, describes ' some agricultural labourers and their wives walking a matter of five miles.' **8.**

Again, membership was likely to have been ' mixed ', reflecting small scale industry, quarrying and mining, as well as farming. Hookagate was the home for many miners, and members of the Shropshire Miners' Association, who walked to work at the Hanwood pits. The union spread even further down the main road and rail routes south, into the Stretton valley, with branches at Leebotwood (a fiefdom of the Corbett family), and at purely agricultural villages like Dorrington, Pitchford, Frodesley and Hungerford and even as far as the market town cum retirement spa of Church Stretton. The upland swathes of south Shropshire were inhospitable ground for both unions, but in those locations in the south where it had previously organised, like Bishop's Castle and Craven Arms, the WU was now entirely displaced by the NUAW. **9.**

The WU consolidated its position in the north and east of the county, advancing with separate branches into certain farming villages on the fringes of the coalfield like Tibberton, Upton Magna, Cressage, Trench, Muckleton and Shawbury. **10.** Although union membership began to drop from 1921 (coinciding with falling produce prices and the abolition of the Agricultural Wages Board), many WU branches which had been founded in the boom clung on tenaciously. It is impossible to say how well supported the branches were, although the WU presence, at least on paper, in Pitchford, Bayston Hill and Shifnal, places where the

NUAW was on strike in the spring of 1923, clearly undermined its effectiveness. (see p.54) Even after the strike, an organising campaign was held by the WU involving meetings in Berrington, Pitchford and Bayston Hill (all places where the NUAW had been out), as well as Longden, Bicton and Ruyton (north west of Shrewsbury), where its branches were well established and Upton Magna (east of Shrewsbury) where it seems to have displaced a NUAW branch which is listed for 1914 but not for 1920. Information on branches and membership is scarce, even from the Workers' Union **Record**. Whilst **Annual Reports** do admit the closure of some branches, reports on the effectiveness of these recruiting campaigns outside well established branches must clearly be doubted. Newport, Church Stretton, and Hungerford (1923), Leintwardine (1924) and Shifnal (1926), as well as the ring of villages around Ellerdine, simply disappear from any record.

Although rallies were organised, like that addressed by Beard in July 1925, the WU did not take full advantage of the Labour Party/TUC rural campaigns, and yielded the initiative to the more energetic NUAW. The WU's strength was in its existing branches, and attempts to establish others as at Allscott, which had the making of a classic ' mixed ' branch, were failures. (see p.44). **11.**

Between 1899 and 1930 around 40 WU branches had been established. By the time of the last **Annual Report** before amalgamation in 1929, 16 or 17 Shropshire branches were still in existence. However, by then, the WU had largely retreated to the eastern coalfield of Shropshire, with only one market town ' mixed ' branch, at Oswestry, still surviving. Ellerdine still survived, with 14 Labour party members in 1931, possibly indicating a similar level of WU membership. Within a few miles of Shrewsbury there were other rural branches, mainly in the larger villages such as Ruyton, Pontesbury and Bayston Hill. These were no doubt the villages more easily accessible to the organiser W. H. Edwards who was based in the town. Surprisingly perhaps, the union also clung on in a few more remote villages to the south and east of Shrewsbury, like Frodesley, Bicton and the estate village of Leebotwood, indicating a tenacious loyalty that belied the view that the WU was an urban phenomenon. In Leebotwood the NUAW had taken over by the 1940s and when interviewed, the branch secretary did not recall any TGWU activity, and had not known of a previous WU branch. In places like this the difficult task of organising farmworkers had to take place again from scratch. **12.**

So it may be concluded that the ability of the WU to organise outside its urban bases in Shrewsbury and the Ironbridge Gorge did little for the long term cause of agricultural trades unionism in the county, and without clear lines of demarcation the effect was to spoil the efforts of the NUAW.

Part Two - The geographical distribution of the National Union of Agricultural Workers

By tradition, the first branches of the NUAW to be formed, in 1913, were at Lydbury North and Prees. These villages were at opposite ends of the county, over thirty miles apart, with quite different types of agriculture. Lydbury North, part of the Walcot estate, purchased by Clive of India, is in the extreme south west of the county, which was greatly affected by Strange's union. However, Lydbury itself (perhaps influenced by the resident Earl of Powis), appears not to have had a branch in 1871 - 72, in contrast to the open villages in the hills to the immediate south. The instigation of the branch there, akin to the foundation of the union in Norfolk in 1906, may have been Liberal Party activity, since the Liberals organised a meeting in Lydbury in May 1913, addressed by Major H. L. Hornsby - the Liberal Prospective Parliamentary Candidate ' to deal with the matter of wages of agricultural labourers.' **13.**

The other 1913 branches were spread throughout the county, with market towns like Whitchurch in the north (where the WU was to found a rival branch in the following year), and the ancient borough of Much Wenlock and nearby villages of Pitchford and Cound to the south east of Shrewsbury, perhaps indicating the effect of one individual. Hodnet, (although close to Prees in the north) was nearer to Beard's Ellerdine, and the remaining branch, Coalport, was in the eastern coalfield, the WU's main stronghold. **14.**

Another 15 branches were in existence by the outbreak of the war. Six of these were in the rich red soils on the right bank of the Severn, below the Ironbridge Gorge, ranging from Kemberton in the north (on the edge of the coalfield), to Alveley in the south (with its own mining tradition). Another clutch of branches was centred on the sandstone dairying/mixed farming villages north of Shrewsbury, with Bomere Heath (scene of George Edwards' meeting in 1914) and Hadnall, soon to be consolidated by strong branches in neighbouring Yorton, Grinshill and Shawbury (the latter was to be challenged by a WU branch in 1920). Other branches were spread across the county, from Chirbury in the far west (' an important breeding and feeding area ' and scene of the haysel strike which may have involved both unions in 1914), Long Stanton in Corvedale and Forton, in the Severn valley west of Shrewsbury, to the market town of Market Drayton in the north east (where Beard had opened a branch in 1899, which was to be revived after the war). Although the outbreak of the war halved membership, fourteen of the existing branches survived and six new ones are listed in 1915, strengthening the union's presence on the eastern edge of the county and in the steer raising upper Severn valley, with a revived branch in the market town of Whitchurch. **15.**

The last year of the war saw a larger number of branches, distributed fairly evenly throughout the county. As the NUAW became embedded into the incipient labour movement, these locations included other market towns like Bishop's Castle, Craven Arms, Ludlow, Newport and Oswestry. The 1918 **Annual Report** gives the impression of branches being active over most of the county, with quite small hamlets like Montford Bridge in the upper Severn Valley and Penley, on the Staffordshire border being represented alongside large open villages, often with an industrial component like Weston Rhyn and St. Martin's, near Oswestry (where coalmines came under the border), Harmer Hill, in the sandstone belt of villages (with its quarrying), and Bucknell, in the extreme south west (with a tanning bark collecting trade). **16.**

The 1919 **Annual Report** marks a high water of around eighty branches. Even in the north - east areas of the county, where the WU had branches, the NUAW was organising. Ellerdine (home of John Beard), had NUAW branches in neighbouring villages like Crudgington, Edgmond and Eaton. Some, like Hodnet, Shawbury and Roden (based on a CWS owned farm) were strong and long lasting. In some places, such as High Ercall, Rodington, Tibberton and Newport, there were rival WU and NUAW branches. Even in the coalfield itself there were NUAW branches at Wellington and Coalbrookdale (again, in rivalry with the WU), at Coalport (with an active membership), and Madeley (where the WU does not seem to have organised). There is no evidence of the WU having penetrated south and east of the coalfield, aside from briefly at Newport (and then probably deterred by a militant NUAW branch). In the north west, around Oswestry, NUAW branches were more thinly scattered than in other parts of the county. Here agriculture was eclipsed by other occupations ; coalmining, quarrying and the railways. Although this engendered a strong labour movement, for example the Oswestry NUR branch had nearly 1,000 members, it does not seem to have had a ' knock on ' effect for the NUAW in terms of creation of more branches. **17.**

Only three areas of Shropshire were not covered by the NUAW. The first was the Clun Forest of the far south west, with its sparse population and small family hill farms, making it virtually indistinguishable from neighbouring Wales. However, there were branches at Clun and eight on the other side of the border in the market towns of Knighton and Presteigne, and other locations in adjoining Radnorshire. **18.** Further, to the south of the forest, in what had been the stronghold of Strange's union, a number of long established branches were located in the the Teme valley. Secondly, the central hills of southern Shropshire, following a north west/south east axis, were largely unexplored by the NUAW. From Chirbury and Worthen, the furthest westerly branches, a ten mile belt covered the inhospitable uplands of the county, encompassing the Stiperstones, the Long Mynd, the Stretton Hills, Wenlock Edge

and the Clee Hills. Whilst much of this was comparatively empty of people, the fertile valleys between, like Corvedale and the Stretton valleys, had no union activity, apart from a few exceptions, such as the weak isolated branch at Stoke St. Milborough, a scattered squatter settlement on the west of Brown Clee, and a 1928 branch at Corfton.

The third area of the county with few NUAW branches, spread out like a segment, north and south of the upland belt. Leaving aside Ludlow, and a later branch at nearby Stanton Lacy, the whole south east of the county, along the Herefordshire and Worcestershire borders (with its mixed farming with fruit and hops) had no branches at all. The only exception was a seemingly short lived market town branch at Cleobury Mortimer in the 1919 heyday, founded by Clarkson, the Worcestershire organiser. **19.** This contrasts with adjoining north Herefordshire where the NUAW seems to have eclipsed the WU in the 1918 - 1921 period, with strong branches in those villages, like Richard's Castle, Leintwardine and Brimfield, which used Ludlow as a market centre.

The 1919 strikes in Shropshire and Staffordshire, (see p. 50) probably had a positive effect, with new branches around Yorton, Hadnall and Shawbury, where the strike had been won and in villages such as Baschurch, Coton and High Ercall (all formed in 1920) Weston (1921) and Roden (1922). So fast was the tide running in favour of the union, that even the major defeat at Gnosall did not deter new branches along the Staffordshire border, at Norton-in-Hales, Sutton, Cheswardine, Hinstock and Albrighton (all founded in 1920). **20.**

The List of Members in Benefit produced for 31st December 1920 is the last document in our period which gives paid up membership details for Shropshire. Although many branches like Ackleton, Lydbury North, Craven Arms and Ludlow, were in triple figures, the list also reveals weak spots like Ash Parva (six members), or Stoke St. Milborough (eight) and even Oswestry had only sixteen members. Nonetheless, with seventy one branches, the NUAW retained a presence across the county, despite the rapid decline in wages. More NUAW meetings seem to have taken place in the northern half of the county, based on existing branches. But rallies centred on the smaller branches, such as one held at Cockshutt in September 1922, could produce ' 14 new members at one meeting alone.' **21.**

On account of the bigger Norfolk dispute in 1923, the NUAW EC instructed the Shropshire strikers to ' combine efforts strictly where the men are strong. The Committee cannot accept the responsibility of calling a county strike as suggested in some quarters.' It appears that Tom Forrester of Yorton, an EC member and county chairman, quarrelled with Fielding over widening the strike. Forrester, a smallholder with almost syndicalist sympathies, may have been the moderate in this instance, as he did not lead out the strong union villages in the

sandstone area, but both men strictly followed the EC's line. Instead ' the most affected area was between Shifnal and Bridgnorth ' and also Bayston Hill (just south of Shrewsbury), and the arc of villages to the east (particularly Condover and Pitchford). **22.** There may also have been a dispute in Ackleton, scene of the successful wartime strike, since the EC later decided that ' Mr Lunnon should meet the Ackleton branch, and county committee, and report on the general position.'

The 1923 defeat was bitterly received in places like Shifnal, where activist John Bince criticised the EC in a letter to the **Wellington Journal** and presumably in Condover where Lloyd Bauley was still receiving victimisation pay fifteen months later. **23.** Fielding's attempts to build up the union after the strike were certainly energetic : ' On Sundays I have been doing as many as five meetings a day.' His itinerary not only covered the existing branches in larger locations, but rallies at smaller branches, for example at Baschurch where (he reported optimistically), ' every non member joined up ', attempts at new branches such as Brockton (near Much Wenlock) and even extended into the WU's territory, with a meeting at Ruyton XI Towns. **24.**

The victimisation and other cases reported to the EC, although concerning well established market town branches such as Newport and Market Drayton, also included isolated village branches such as Clungunford in the south - west. The first tied cottage eviction court case fought by the union under the new Agricultural Holdings Act concerned a member in Tong, a hamlet near Shifnal in ' the Ryelands ' on the eastern county border. All indications are therefore that the NUAW was maintaining some sort of presence throughout the county. **25.**

Although the regular seasonal rallies of the union were held in the larger centres, the TUC/Labour party rural campaigns of 1925 and 1926 did not ignore the smaller villages, with events in Hampton Heath (a branch in the lower Severn valley), Hodnot and Worthen. **26.** This pattern continued with the annual General Secretary's visits later in the decade. In 1928 these were used by Fielding to increase membership in well developed branches (a meeting at Corfton in Corvedale boasted ' 24 new members '), to revive lapsed branches, such as Westbury, in the upper Severn Valley, and even to establish new ones. This is indicated by a report of a meeting in Cantlop, near Pitchford, where for the last time the **Shrewsbury Chronicle** confused the NUAW with the WU. **27.**

The TUC Report on the 1925 campaign gave all Shropshire except Shrewsbury to the NUAW as a sphere of influence. However, this may not indicate the relative strengths of the two unions, since Herefordshire and Cheshire (where the NUAW had many strong branches), were allocated to the WU. **28.** In the 1929 General Election, A. A. Beach, Labour candidate

for Shrewsbury, was expected to win the seat. The list of villages within the constituency in which he held meetings reads like a roll call of NUAW branches and bears a striking similarity to the places visited by the General Secretary a year earlier. The indication is that away from the main railway lines, the rural labour movement was the NUAW. **29.**

Although the NUAW was present throughout the county, there were certain areas where the concentration of trades unionism was higher. This is true of the market towns which all had NUAW branches, except Church Stretton (which briefly had a WU branch) and Cleobury Mortimer, where the NUAW presence was fleeting. Most market town branches with the exception of Ludlow, Bridgnorth, Much Wenlock and Ellesmere, had to contend with WU opposition at some point. Market town branches probably served a surrounding agricultural area and often had non farmworkers as branch officials. Tom Hardwick of Ludlow, a railway signalman, was the best example of this.

Some remote groups of villages can be identified where unionism briefly became a focal point for working class political and cultural activity, in the way that is convincingly described in Howkins' work on Norfolk. These cover four separate areas within the county ; in the east, along the Severn Valley, around Bridgnorth and the Shifnal/Albrighton area to the north and the ' sandstone' villages to the north of Shrewsbury - a belt stretching from Baschurch in the east, through Bomere Heath, Yorton, Hadnall and Hodnet. A third area stretches immediately to the south - east of Shrewsbury, from Bayston Hill, east towards the Severn at Ironbridge, and fourthly, the valleys of south - west Shropshire, the area of Strange's old union, strengthened by the railway centre of Craven Arms.

Conclusion

The WU did try to oppose the NUAW in the villages as well as the market towns. Rival branches are recorded, sometimes at different times, but often contemporaneously, at Leebotwood, Coalbrookdale, Cressage, Dorrington, Chirbury, Bayston Hill, Great Ness, Upton Magna, High Ercall, Rodington, Shifnal, Tibberton and Whixall. The NUAW attempted revenge with an unsuccessful branch at Ruyton in 1923. Sometimes odd WU branches were found, and respected, in NUAW ' territory ', so for example, the Berrington WU branch was surrounded by NUAW branches at Condover, Pitchford and Cound.

Nevertheless, the impression is that the geographical strength of the WU was in the market towns (where it was based on small industries), Beard's home area of Ellerdine (where as we have seen it was often threatened by the NUAW) and a fringe of larger villages to the west of Shrewsbury (like Ruyton XI Towns, Bicton and Hookagate), which again may relate

to a semi-industrial membership. Above all, the WU had its old centre in the eastern coalfield from whence it could and did expand it propitious times. Even in the latter district though, the union was curiously unable to spread beyond its limits and the NUAW was successful in establishing branches on its rim. This research has located 37 WU branches altogether in Shropshire, which compared with the 105 locations which had an NUAW presence during the period, gives an indication of the relative strengths of the unions. Although as has been stressed hard evidence on numbers of members is sparse and patchy, there is no reason to suggest that rural WU branches were bigger on average than NUAW branches. It can be tentatively concluded that the NUAW was roughly three times as large as its rival and geographically more widespread throughout the region. The difficulties of maintaining its strategy of active grass roots branches meant that its core membership was probably stronger in the four clusters of villages identified above. Yet this relatively strong organic village structure undoubtedly enabled the NUAW to weather the post 1921 agricultural depression better than its rivals.

The ideological conflict between the NUAW and WU often spilt over into pointless geographical conflict. Although the temptation is to suggest that the WU unneccessarily extended outwards into virgin territory which would have been better organised by a completely rural union, the NUAW itself showed no compunction in trying its luck at organising either in the eastern coalfield or in semi - industrial Shropshire villages. One cannot help but conclude that the question of which union organised farmworkers in a particular location diverted and wasted an enormous amount of energy for both organisations. Whilst an attempt will be made later to explain this conflict this will of necessity be conjectural and any causal relationship may be entirely accidental.

1. Beard op.cit. p.97, John Beard **Early Struggles of the Union**, WU **Record** September 1919 and July 1920, Green op.cit. p.142 - 144, and Hyman op.cit. p.27.
2. WU **Annual Report** 1905 and WU **Record** August 1925.
3. Ibid. November 1913 and January 1914, WU **Annual Report** 1914. For the Quarrymen's Union see **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 23.1.20 and below p.115.
4. For a WU branch based on an agricultural implement maker in North Walsham, Norfolk, see the F.Randell and Son collection at the Norfolk Rural Life Museum, Gressenhall. Scotland **Gloucestershire** op.cit. p.146 and Modern Records Centre MSS 208.
5. WU **Record** October and December 1915, WU **Annual Report** 1916.
6. WU **Record** September 1917 and April 1918. None of these branches are recorded in the WU **Annual Reports** for 1917 and 1918.

7. WU **Record** March 1918, Pretty op.cit. p.42. For Chirbury see WU **Annual Report** 1914, WU **Record** April 1914 and a Labour party meeting addressed by W.H.Edwards in **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 13.12.18.

8. WU **Annual Reports** 1918, 1919, 1920 and 1921, **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 24.9.20.

9. **Annual Reports** as 8, plus 1914 for Craven Arms, for Leebotwood see **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 11.2.21 and p.171. For the Hookagate miners see **Shropshire Within Living Memory** (1992) p.105, although no direct link has been found between the Miners' Association and the WU.

10. **Annual Reports** as 8, plus 1923, for Frodesley and Bicton see **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 22.9.22.

11. WU **Annual Reports** 1922, 1923, 1924, 1925 and 1926. WU **Record** July 1925.

12. WU **Annual Reports** 1927 and 1928, SRO Wrekin Labour Party Records, Lists of delegates 1931. For the local election activity of the TGWU see **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 24.10.30. Interview with Bill Roberts, ex - branch secretary at Dorrington, in the 1950s, which covered Leebotwood, 19.7.95.

13. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 21.3.58, NUAAW **Annual Report** 1973, NUAW Records AWU 193, **Annual Report** 1913 and **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 16.5.13. The Lydbury North Conservative Association records survive in the SRO see p.180.

14. NUAW Records AWU 195, **Annual Report** 1913, EC Minutes 8.11.13 record ' a rumour concerning a union candidate for that Division ', evidently from the Newport Liberal Assocation.

15. NUAW Records B VIII 2 List of Members as at 30.6.15.

16. Ibid AWU 193 and **Annual Report** 1918. For Craven Arms see **The Labourer** January 1918 and **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 16.8.18. St. Martins was the home of Tom Morris, miner and the son of a farmworker, who was Labour Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Oswestry see **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 29.11.18. For Bucknell see Pentabus Community Project **Bucknell Talking** (1982) p.45.

17. NUAW Records AWU 194 and **Annual Report** 1919. For the Newport area see **Wellington Journal** 24.3.23. For the labour movement around Oswestry see reports of Tom Morris's campaigns in **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 3.11.22, 10.11.22, and 17.11.22 and pp.115 - 116.

18. NUAW Records AWU 194, **Annual Report** 1919 and Pretty op.cit.Chapter V especially pp.116 - 118.

19. Kidderminister Times 17.5.19 and NUAW Records; AWU 194. **Annual Report** 1919. Pollard, the Labour candidate in the disastrous 1923 bye - election had a particularly rough time in the south east of the county ; with his supporters roughly handled and his wife pelted with dung - see **Labour Leader** 23.4.23.

20. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 23.11.17, 8.9.22, 22.9.22, 22.6.23, 9.10.25, 23.10.25, 30.10.25, 1.1.26 and **The Landworker** October 1928.

21. NUAW Records B V III 2 List of members in Benefit 31.12.20 and **The Landworker** September 1922.

22. NUAW Records EC Minutes 5.3.23, 16.3.23 and 25/26.7.23.

23. Ibid 10.5.23, 21.6.23, 11.11.24, **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 16.3.23, and **Wellington Journal** 24.3.23.

24. **The Landworker** September 1922 and December 1923, **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 3.10.24.

25. NUAW Records EC Minutes 29.4.27 and **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 7.11.24.

26. Ibid 25.7.25, 1.1.26 and 10.9.26.

27. **The Landworker** October 1928 and **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 20.1.28 and 20.7.28.

28. TUC **Annual Report** 1926 p.126.

29. See for instance meetings reported in **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 24.5.29 and **The Landworker** October and December 1928.

Chapter 4 - Explanations centring on local and national leaderships

This chapter will attempt to provide explanations for the growth and distribution of agricultural trades unionism in Shropshire centred on local and national leadership issues within the National Union of Agricultural Workers (NUAW) and Workers' Union (WU). However as the complex relationship **between** the two unions was the key to these developments it is first necessary to examine their general interaction in Shropshire and at national level, including how this has been described by historians. The differences in the leadership, policies, tactics and organisation will then be explored in some detail, firstly at national and then at local level. Evidence suggests that interactions in the field of national and local leaderships are relatively important in explaining the growth and distribution of agricultural trades unionism within the county.

The relationship between the Workers' Union and National Union of Agricultural Workers

Historians of the farmworkers' unions have, by and large, made light of any difficulties in the relationship between the WU and the NUAW. The official historian of the NUAW, Reg Groves, states of its rival in 1913 : ' Its efforts were not directly competitive with the Norfolk union, and even after this union became a national union, the Workers' Union grew for the most part in areas where little or no organising was going on.' Groves had studied the Executive Committee minutes of the period as well as ' material gathered from talks with leading Union members ', and can have had no doubt that the position was not quite that simple **1.** He was though, reflecting the view of earlier historians like Green and Selley who did not mention the possibility of conflict between the unions, even though at the time they were writing (1919 and 1920), disputes had already taken place over the inclusion of WU nominees on the Agricultural Wages Board. On this issue, Selley for example, was content to quote both R. B. Walker and George Dallas on the beneficial effect of the board on union membership. Selley and Green may have just been carried away by the astronomical growth of both unions from 1917. Selby over - optimistically commented : ' nearly 250,000 farmworkers are paying into a union. If this rate of progress is maintained for another year, the farmworkers will be one of the most closely organised wage earners in the UK .' Similarly, Green a year later wrote : ' We may reckon that more than half of the agricultural labourers in England and Wales are organised industrially ' **2.** To comment adversely on the realities of retaining this membership as the agricultural depression started would have perhaps seemed both pedantic and treacherous.

It is more likely, however, that the slightly patronising way in which farmworkers were regarded by the rest of the labour movement provides a better explanation for the coyness of historians in facing internal problems. From Tolpuddle onward organised rural workers were regarded as loyal and worthy, albeit slightly dull figures who were mercifully divorced from any internal wrangling which beset other parts of the labour movement. So few of them were organised, and so great was their courage in doing so, that any suggestion of normal failings seemed to smack of betrayal. Gröves was a professional writer, and although personally far to the left of Edward Gooch, he took his line from the NUAW Executive Committee which had not ruled out an accommodation with the TGWU, possibly resulting in amalgamation.

More surprising, perhaps, is the longevity of this view. As late as 1991 Nigel Scotland concluded : ' Although in earlier years there had been considerable rivalry between the WU and the NUAW such never appears to be the case in Gloucestershire.' He summarised the division of seats on the local wages boards in 1917 : ' In the event there appear to have been no struggle between the two unions... there are no reports of rivalry or hard feelings in the Gloucestershire press, and the minutes and reports of the committee meetings indicate the workers' side working in good faith and harmony.' Even more recently, David Pretty, historian of the unions in Wales, is of the opinion that by and large, the NUAW and WU organised in separate geographical areas. **3.**

A more realistic view of the division of the seats on the workers' side of the Agricultural Wages Board was voiced as early as 1920 by George Edwards : ' It was a most difficult task as we had two unions catering for one industry and there was a great spirit of rivalry existing between them, which created a bitter spirit between the two sections. This was to be regretted and caused friction when there ought to have been harmony.' **4.** Hyman recognised that the rivalry between the unions started **before** the introduction of the Wages Board, and that : ' the allocation of seats on the District Wages Committees involved long and acrimonious disputes between the officials of the two unions.' He considered that the NUAW was at fault as it : ' refused to consider any compromise which would dilute its claim to exclusive representation of farmworkers.' He also felt that in 1919 when wage levels were running in favour of the unions the NUAW failed to back the WU's militant campaigns in Lancashire, Cheshire and Northumberland to push wages above the minimum set by the Boards. **5.**

Another modern commentator, Howkins, does not mention the dispute between the unions, because Norfolk, his area of study, was solid NUAW territory. For Newby, the conflict was based on the contrasting structures of the two trade unions. He claims the WU was federal, decentralised and prepared to be more flexible in its wage demands, where prevailing

agricultural conditions dictated. He traces this back to the purpose of the WU in recruiting farmworkers to curb the wage cutting propensities in the towns of cheap incoming rural labour. His WU was responsive and more militant than the more staid NUAW. Particularly after George Edwards' retirement, Newby feels that the union adopted a centralised policy with its potential power to affect wages, abrogated to the state machinery introduced in 1917. **6.** His description of the relationship between the two unions and some inconsistencies in his material, will be challenged, supported by Shropshire evidence The county is a good test bed for this to be done given the relative strength of both unions locally, and the personal interest of national leaders.

The view of the Executive Committee of the NUAW towards their rivals of the WU can be traced in their minutes. As early as December 1913 the ' correspondence the secretary [R.B.Walker], had with Workers' Union concerning their actions in Shropshire was noted ' and the following May ' Letters were read from Mr. Mackley re. the tactics of the Workers Union and noted.' **7.** The ' action and tactics ' of the WU probably referred to their temerity in attempting to organise farmworkers, which the NUAW saw as its rightful, albeit unfruitful, area of operations. By the middle of the war labour shortages worked in favour of both unions, and were intensified by the introduction of conscription. The WU by participating in the workings of the district military tribunals in Shropshire, sought perhaps to gain fair treatment for working class people. By participating in the extension of the corporate state the WU gained a lead over the NUAW, when minimum wage legislation was being developed. Thus the level of friction increased immediately after the introduction of the Agricultural Wages Board. So in December 1917 the NUAW's EC noted that ' the Workers' Union was again discussed and it was agreed to circularise NUR branches.' But the involvement of the NUAW's natural ally could not check the growth in **both** unions which the wages board system produced, and by the following spring the union had agreed to meetings with its rival. **8.**

These meetings were held under the auspices of the Parliamentary Committee of the TUC and involved James Lunnon and Tom Mackley of the NUAW, and John Beard and Charles Duncan of the WU, all with Shropshire connections. The county was the frontline in the conflict and sufficiently important to both leaderships to make negotiations meaningful. They ended though in an impasse, with the NUAW complaining bitterly that unlike other overlapping unions, for example the Dockers, General Workers and Scottish Farm Servants, with whom it had a ' perfect understanding ', the WU refused to hand over farmworkers in rural areas where the NUAW was beginning to make progress. ' The consequence was that in the same area and district there were two unions competing for the agricultural worker.' The WU pointed out that they had been organising farmworkers longer than the NUAW, that they

were often organising in areas where the NUAW was absent, and that their tactic of supporting farmworkers with mixed branches was ' effective and most economical.' Given their number of representatives on the wages boards - artificially high because of government gerrymandering (see pp.42 and 80), the WU were in no mood to give up their farmworkers. However, the union did propose another conference to decide areas of influence and the easy transfer of members, with the TUC conciliating on any disagreement. The TUC suggested further the formation of a federation of unions organising farmworkers or using perhaps the existing National Federation of General Workers. The NUAW held a special executive meeting on the proposals on 8th June 1918 in Norwich, which resolved it ' cannot agree to federating with unions who cater for others than Agricultural and Rural Workers.' The Norfolk rump of the union, concerned to hold their primary position, thus rejected reconciliation, and so reduced the long term prospects for both organisations. **9.**

The conflict continued, with the NUAW's EC being notified of disputes in parts of the country ranging from East Yorkshire where ' Mr Rapson, late chairman of Market Weighton . . (was) appointed organiser for the WU and was working hard against us. Five branches had gone over ', to Northamptonshire where the WU official George Dallas' ' candidature for Wellingborough was considered to have created a very dangerous position.' **10.** The NUAW was not the only union to take exception to the activities of the WU. Between 1919 and 1930 five other unions registered seven complaints with the TUC against the ' poaching ' of the WU, more than any other single union. The WU was not always found guilty, as in 1925, when the NUAW accused A.E.Stubbs, a WU organiser, who previously had worked for the NUAW of ' causing 21 members to go over ' in Wilbraham, Cambridgeshire. Stubbs claimed that : ' There was no organisation of the agricultural workers in the county at all. The Branches had gone. The members had nobody to look after them.' A.A.H. Findlay, TUC General Secretary, found in his favour but added that it was ' Imperative in the interests of the agricultural workers that more co - operation should be adopted between the two unions.' **11.**

Although Hyman dates the conflict between the two unions to the 1918 TUC, as we have seen it actually dates from 1913, with the basic cause being the extension of the town based WU into the countryside. The tension was also exacerbated by the political stance and philosophy of both unions on the outbreak of the war. Like other pre - war syndicalistic union leaderships, that of the WU swung to embrace populist and jingoistic support for the war Beard and Duncan adopted a more dictatorial position within the union (e.g. over the 1915 Munitions Act). Outside it, they became members of the British Workers' League, the government's organisation for channelling the labour movement's support for the war effort. Despite being wooed for the Coalition Government by the Shropshire Conservative M.P. and

cabinet minister Henry Bridgeman, neither leader became involved in the National Democratic and Labour Party which ran working class candidates in opposition to the Labour Party in the ' khaki ' election of 1918. Locally the Shropshire WU was equally patriotic with activist W.H.Holloway one of the speakers at a Joint Labour Recruiting campaign meeting at Shrewsbury in the autumn of 1915, to revive flagging enlistments. To aid the many members in the forces, events were held like the Ironbridge concert ' to provide gifts to 53 branch members in the forces.' **12.**

The WU's patriotic view was in contrast to the policy of the NUAW. Here two strands were dominant. The Liberal nonconformist old guard, around George Edwards, reluctantly supported the war effort. Edwards was criticised for being drawn in to the corporate state mainly by supporting recruitment of women to landwork as a solution to the wartime labour shortage. Neither union had made much attempt to recruit women landworkers. Although the issue is still subject to debate, it is accepted that regular field work for women declined in the late Victorian period. As part of a general cultural shift it became unacceptable for farmworkers' wives to do rough work, which exposed them to possible immorality.**13.** A delegate at an NUAW conference opposing Edwards neatly summarised both arguments : ' nothing was more shocking (than) to see women drabbling about in the fields...if women were allowed to work on the land, down would come wages.' However in March 1915, the agricultural correspondent of the **Shrewsbury Chronicle** predicted that ; ' the sight of women engaged busily at many important tasks, would recall the practice of sixty years ago...we shall probably see the women of the villages turn out this summer.' When this was slow to materialise, Lord Selborne, Minister of Agriculture, tried to persuade a farmers' meeting at Shrewsbury Shire Hall to employ women. But here T.W.Bromley of the NFU considered, correctly as it turned out, that he ' did not think it was possible to give up their present habits and resume field work which was common thirty five years ago.' **14.**

However, Edwards' assistance for this movement was coupled with an insistence on trade union rights. His immense prestige within the union, prevented a breach with the other strand within the NUAW, which was represented by the neutralist socialism of R.B.Walker. This is not to say that rank and file NUAW members were ' unpatriotic ', despite the readiness with which the strike was deliberately used in industrial disputes as the war progressed. Instead it displayed the ambivalent mixture of pride of sacrifice - ' The Toll of War ' column in **The Landworker**, listed members killed in the conflict like A.L.Luscott of Pitchford in July 1915 - with a hope for something better for working class people in the future. (see also pp.125 - 127)

Within the WU, despite some rank and file objections, the war period gave the union's leadership more of an appetite for compromising with the state and employers. It was this attitude which coloured and weakened the union's post-war position and poisoned its relationship with the NUAW. In the last year of the war, the WU organisers made the most of their opportunities to increase membership, particularly around the Home Counties. This coincided with the introduction of the Corn Production Act (CPA) of 1917, which both unions supported. They saw the importance of representation on the Agricultural Wages Board (AWB), set up to oversee a minimum wage for farmworkers, as a spur to recruitment. At last they would have something positive to offer non - members. The government used the recent influx of WU members to offer preferment in the composition of the workers' side of the AWB. So whilst their overall agricultural membership level justified only two nominees, compared to the NUAW's six , the assumption that the WU patriotic leadership was a ' safe pair of hands ' led the Board of Agriculture to nominate four ' independent ' worker representatives who were, or who rapidly became, WU members. This official favouritism was extended to overepresentation on county AWBs, often where the WU had no farming members at all. In Shropshire this meant equal representation with the larger NUAW. This development gave kudos to the WU where its efforts at organising members did not merit it, which is a key explanation for the tenacity of the union, even during the post war depression. It also meant that that the NUAW had to put scarce resources into thwarting its rival.

The outrage felt by the NUAW clearly led to a deterioration in the relationship between the two unions. The WU's enthusiastic campaign also rather undermines Newby's argument that it was the NUAW rather than the WU that embraced the Wage Board system. **15.** There is Shropshire evidence to suggest that the unions did work together to obtain a better settlement for all workers in the Corn Production Act period. The county NFU minutes reveal that in 1919 and 1920 both unions were regarded with equal suspicion. Although Kilvert, the NFU Chair refused to sit with Bill Fielding, the NUAW organiser, the WU's propaganda was thought to be so subversive that it was brought to the notice of the chief constable. In the joint negotiations for County Council roadmens' wages, a regular conference of the two unions seems to have developed. Even after the wages boards were abolished, local leaders pressed for their reinstatement in almost indentical language. W.H.Edwards of the WU predicted ' Any voluntary system of regulating wages will be an absolute farce' , and Lunnon of the NUAW claimed ' the farmworkers got more real good out of it (the AWB) than 10,000 strikes.' **16.**

Newby's idea (p. 114) is that between 1917 and 1921 the NUAW was wedded to state regulations and that the decentralised WU was more militant in its wages demands. Yet the NUAW General Secretary R.B.Walker was clear, writing at the end of 1918 that : ' too much

reliance must not be placed either on the Wages Board or District Wage Committees, but rather we should rely on our organisation to secure that for which we are fighting.' **17.** This is exactly what the NUAW did in Shropshire every summer from 1916 until 1919.(see pp.48 - 50) Other Shropshire evidence suggests that the exact opposite of Newby's thesis is true, that the WU leadership, having become more dictatorial and inclined to corporatist solutions in wartime, continued them in peacetime, so that its members were giving increasing concessions to the employers. In a situation where, even in its heyday, a majority of farmworkers were still unorganised, the effect was to undermine all efforts of the NUAW. As was discussed in the last chapter the WU was less aggressive in Shropshire than the NUAW which continued to use strikes or threats of strikes from 1914 onwards. Although the wartime offensive and the Shropshire haysel strikes of 1919 were successful, the slightly later strikes on the Shropshire/Staffordshire border, had mixed results. Carried forward by rank and file enthusiasm and privately disapproved of by the NUAW's EC, the Gnosall strike was doomed when the farmers got in their corn harvest. The situation was compounded by the presence of WU members in the area and whilst there is no evidence that the WU actually blacklegged, the failure caused great bitterness locally, with some violent incidents. Although the NUAW EC decided to close down the strike, whilst trying to support those farmworkers who were victimised, they are likely to have shared the bitterness of their Shropshire and Staffordshire colleagues towards the WU (see p.50).

Although informal conferences on AWB policy continued to be held, the leaderships of both unions sustained their disagreement over the limitation of hours proposed by the Hours of Employment Bill, being discussed at the turn of the year. John Beard, speaking for Charles Duncan at the Wrekin bye - election of January 1920, was firmly of the opinion that : ' No-one who understood agriculture would be so foolish as to say no - one should work longer than forty eight hours in any one week. It is no longer open to the opponents of the Forty Eight Hours Bill to assert that the agriculture labourers who are organised in the WU desire to make it illegal to work more than forty eight hours a week.' The WU in Shropshire had already held a crucial meeting in October 1919 with the County NFU which had ' mobilised to resist the shortening of men's hours . . . as campaigned for by a certain Labour union as part of the Hours of Employment Bill '. As well as settling winter hours (apparently without reference to the NUAW) the WU and NFU agreed to the following proposals :

' 1. WU to request members to work the number of hours required over and above forty eight hours per week as arranged with their own men.

2. Farmers to pay overtime rates as laid down by the Agricultural Wages Board.

3. A Saturday half holiday, where possible would be provided, given stock needs. ' **18.**

There is no evidence that this clear threat from the WU in reaching a separate deal with their newfound friends in the NFU was considered by the NUAW EC, but Fielding's request to hold

a county conference may have been a reaction to this development. The presence of the General Secretary at the conference in Shrewsbury in January 1920 may also indicate that the relationship between the two unions was deteriorating in the light of the WU seeking a separate settlement with the employers, which was deliberately less than the the NUAW would be prepared to accept. **19.**

By the summer of 1920, the WU accused the NUAW of wrecking its own strike action in Essex. It claimed that the local NUAW organiser had accepted a lower rate than had previously been jointly decided between the two unions. Beard, in a leader in the **Record**, claimed that the Farmers' Federation was bringing in blacklegs from Norfolk and that ' in view of the fact that the Agricultural Labourers' Union claim they dominate the whole county of Norfolk that the situation wears a sinister aspect.' Newby sees it (p. 231) as an example of the centralising consequence of : ' the commitment of the NUAW to the Wages Board, that it was prepared to commit one of the most heinous crimes in the trade unionist's book and sabotage a fellow union's dispute.' The NUAW EC strenuously denied the charge, claiming that the WU was ' trying to throw the failure of the strike on to this Union.' The NUAW explanation that its organiser had responded to ' Meetings in Essex . . . where we were specially invited by the Agricultural Workers ', paints a more accurate picture of the confused patchwork of post war organisation, which was inevitably compounded by the activities of the two unions, rather than the head office centralisation theory postulated by Newby. His verdict that ' Not surprisingly conflict between the two unions was never far below the surface thereafter ' ignores the previous seven years of friction. Shropshire evidence underlines the fact that it was always the WU which was prepared to compromise with employers to the point of strike breaking. **20.**

The worsening condition of farmworkers was aggravated by the repeal of the Corn Production Act in 1921. Some members of the WU were already critical of its operation. During an unemployment deputation to a Shrewsbury Town Council meeting which included W.H. Edwards and Billy Fielding, the latter clashed with one of Edwards' WU colleagues, R. Evans of Shawbury. Evans who had already been active as a member of wartime military tribunals, thought it unfair the ' farmers were compelled by law to pay uneconomic wages.' Fielding publicly defended the AWBs : ' When you get the young ones to work for nothing, you will throw the old ones out of employment '. **21.** Nationally, though, as the AWBs were replaced by voluntary conciliation committees, the WU and NUAW continued to hold informal meetings. As wages continued to fall in 1922, in Shropshire the WU met with the NFU and Country Landowners' Association (CLA), and for the first time, the NUAW. After a ' very lengthy discussion on wages ' they ' all agreed on assistance from Government ' as the way to solve the problem. The inclusion of the NUAW may have been an aberration since

they were not included in another joint conference of CLA, NFU and WU early in 1923. This may have been because the WU wanted to retain its position as the preferred union of the employers, even to the extent of undermining the NUAW's activities. **22.**

This accords with the actions of the WU in the wage reduction crisis in the spring of 1923. The NUAW accused the WU of treacherously settling with the class enemy : ' Despite the fact that we have had an agreement with the WU to the effect that our respective representatives on the Conciliation Committee should not agree to any terms which do not provide for at least a wage of 30s per week (of not more than fifty hours in Summer, forty eight in winter), the employers' representatives and the WU representatives agreed to a rate of 30s '. In parts of the county, as we have seen (p.54) NUAW members were locked out ostensibly until they accepted the wage cut, but in reality some farmers saw the dispute as a way of ridding themselves of employees they regarded as disloyal. With the more important Norfolk dispute providing a national standard wage settlement, the NUAW EC did not feel inclined to over extend itself : ' After full consideration of the various reports from Shropshire and carefully reviewing the whole situation, whilst prepared to support fully every district that feels sufficiently strong to take drastic action, this committee cannot accept the responsibility of calling a county strike.' **23.**

Undoubtedly the 1923 Shropshire strike fell apart because of the decision of the WU to accept a further wage cut. Furthermore the WU decision to stand aside gave it a potential power to blackleg. This position caused the NFU to decide ' that they decline to treat with the NUAW.' **24.** W.H. Edwards half - heartedly attempted to justify his actions in a letter to the **Wellington Journal**, replying to several attacks on the WU policy by Fielding.' Mr Fielding knows also the fight put up by the workers' delegates . . . the agreement does **not** raise hours, but fifty three hours . . . is to be a guaranteed working week . . . the Conciliation Committee recognised for the first time a Saturday half holiday '. Fielding replied again that ' less than 7d. per hour is to condemn the farmworkers to semi starvation . . . and place once more upon their shoulders and the shoulders of their wives and children a far greater share of the burden of carrying on the industry than they should be expected to bear.' By July 1923 Edwards ' argued that 30s.in wages was not sufficient for the worker and that the industry could afford to pay more especially if proper farming were carried out.' **25.** It was not that the WU disagreed with the end result, but they felt that the tactic of conciliation with the employers was more effective. Even though farmworkers' wages stabilised, this tactic proved to be mistaken and the WU failed to thrive, and disappeared by the end of the decade.

Extraordinarily perhaps, given this ' betrayal ', was the degree of forebearance shown by the NUAW, and the co-operation of the two unions in other spheres. For instance during the war

both unions campaigned against the reduction of the school leaving age in rural districts even though in most policies the WU was content to pursue a ' patriotic ' line. **26.** There seemed some possibility that Beard and Duncan, through their espousal of the ' worker patriotism ' of the British Workers' League, would take their union into the short lived National Democratic and Labour Party. However, class loyalties held firm and the WU, at least in Shropshire, remained committed to the Labour Party. Intriguingly, just after the ' khaki election ' the secretary of the Shropshire NFU was ' instructed to write for the Aims and Objectives of the National Democratic and Labour Party '. **27.** That both NFU and WU apparently shared a common ' patriotic ' political viewpoint may indicate their greater willingness to co-operate industrially in the post war years. Politically the NUAW and WU both hepled to found the local Labour Party. James Lunnon was living in Shrewsbury during the last year of the war and moved the motion adopting the first Labour candidate for the constituency, W.H. Edwards chaired meetings for the candidate at Chirbury and was the first chairman of the Labour Party in nearby Montgomery. Both unions were involved together in the Shrewsbury May Day celebrations of 1919 and 1921. **28.**

The WU trying to maximise its parliamentary representation, was concerned to find a seat for Charles Duncan, who had been ejected from his Barrow - in - Furness seat in the ' khaki election '. Duncan made two attempts to win The Wrekin bye - elections in 1920, both times supported wholeheartedly by the NUAW. General Secretary R.B. Walker, at the county conference in Shrewsbury spoke of : ' urging not only our members, but every worker (men and women) to work and vote for Labour in the Wrekin By - Election, regarding Charles Duncan as being not only the WU nominee nor the miners' nominee, but the standard bearer of the working classes.' Even George Edwards, the founder of the NUAW and recent victor of the South Norfolk bye - election, and only just weaned away from the Liberal Party, was brought in to speak for Duncan. **29.** Although ' Mr Duncan's poll is considered very good ', the winners on both occasions were independents, promoted by Horatio Bottomley, jingoistic proprietor of **John Bull**. Even at the height of its post war expansion, farmworkers' unions could not win the seat for Labour, although in the 1929 election Edith Picton - Somerville was successful with, according to critics, ' increasing support of thousands of flappers'. **30.**

In March 1923, a bye - election occurred in Ludlow. ' The local Labour Party, are endeavouring to persuade R.B. Walker, secretary of the NUAW to contest the seat, but up to present have been unsuccessful.' At the height of the disputes in Norfolk, Shropshire and elsewhere, given ' so much industrial trouble etc.', Walker declined, despite appeals from Labour Party headquarters and the National Administrative Council of the Independent Labour Party. Tom Hardwick, who was a Ludlow town councillor, railway signalman, secretary of the NUAW branch, and later Prospective Parliamentary Candidate, also refused.

The third choice was Percy Pollard of the ILP, an ex - WU organiser, although the WU did not give him official backing, and as we have seen, was not strong in this part of the county. Extraordinarily even after the WU declined to back the NUAW' s Shropshire dispute, Walker offered his support, writing to Labour Party headquarters : ' I have yours re. Ludlow . . . Pollard was an organiser of the WU but is now Labour Agent, Colchester. Of course we cannot do other than support him as a Labour candidate, and if possible I will go down and give them a meeting as they are pressing me hard.' **31.**

The difficulty in securing a good candidate confirms the view that the whole campaign was half hearted and although an unidentified Labour worker near Bridgnorth gave a more realistic account : ' Socialists are in the field not so much with any hopes of capturing the seat, as to ' get in ' some really effective propaganda work' , even this was not achieved as Pollard came a miserable third. **32.** ' There must be no more Ludlows ', declared **The Landworker**, but NUAW solution seems to have been to avoid any contest. So in August 1924 : ' The General Secretary reported that he had received an invitation from the Shrewsbury Labour Party to contest the Division at the next election. Decided to take no action meanwhile '. It was perhaps the only realistic outcome. **33.**

In local politics, the two union organisers, Fielding and Edwards, continued to work together. Whilst Fielding was discouraged by his union from standing as a local candidate, he was able to give a glowing reference for his rival, when he was planning to stand for a Shrewsbury town council seat : ' Edwards was one of the most straight forward men he had ever worked with in the Labour movement . . (who) ceaselessly worked for the unemployed.' **34.** At a grass roots level, various pleas were made for co - operation between the unions to improve unity for the organised farmworker and decrease the number of the unorganised. An anonymous farmworker's wife responded to the Shropshire AWB offer of January 1925 : ' I did expect . . . the Wages Board would produce something more in its balance than this. Join your union and agitate more, because the lack of unity alone is responsible for these miserable proposals '. An unknown agriculture worker commented ; ' much can be accomplished . . by the agricultural workers if they will stand together and speak with one voice through their unions '. **35.**

At the 1925 TUC matters came to a head. This was perhaps prompted by another incident when ' Fielding was sent to Nevin, Caernarvonshire, where an unfortunate affair has arisen between the WU and ourselves.' As part of the appeal for the labour movement's proposed rural campaign, George Edwards, no doubt recalling the many union splits in his working life, commented, ' there must be no two voices going forward and getting them organised.' Agreeing with the proposed TUC grant of £1,000, Charles Duncan had ' no desire to enter

into any controversial subject in regard to . . . the better organisation of the agricultural workers'. The General Council ' considered that any form of appeal which would lead to or intensify competition between the NUAW and the WU would defeat the purpose of the resolution.' However, on a trial basis they approved the grant on condition that both unions would ' refrain in specified areas from any competitive appeal to the agricultural worker ' and that an agreement be reached ' not to campaign in debatable areas for the time being.' Ten rural counties were divided into ' areas of influence ' where the general council campaigned on behalf of each union. **36.**

This pilot campaign was evidently a success, since the NUAW claimed 3,426 new members, but by February 1926 it threatened to withdraw from the following year's scheme ' because of the WU's demands for areas where they (the NUAW) had had branches.' So the following month an elaborate division of the rural counties of England and Wales took place. Shropshire, ' excepting Shrewsbury ', became an NUAW ' area of influence '. The 1926 campaign was not as successful, with only 1,568 new NUAW recruits and the WU's vague figure of ' approximately 1,000 ' apparently over two years, seems to confirm that this offered no way forward for co-operation. **37.**

R.B.Walker, the belligerent and decidedly socialist NUAW General Secretary left the union under a cloud in March 1928. Opposed to what he regarded as the distasteful politics of the WU, Walker's resignation removed a barrier between the two unions. With seemingly little in the way of policy dividing the two, and with a common problem of attracting and retaining a membership from the unorganised majority in their sector, there was a decided move for amalgamation. Partly this came from the exasperated TUC. A.H.Findlay, General Secretary, wrote that it was ' imperative in the interests of the agricultural workers that more co - operation should be adopted between the two unions.' The minutes of the EC of the NUAW record a meeting on 14th December 1928 ' between the WU and ourselves, John Beard the President of the WU visited the office for a private consultation on 7th December and made certain representations and asked for further consultation.' A letter was written subsequently, suggesting a meeting between Charles Duncan, WU General Secretary and a strong NUAW delegation including George Edwards and Edwin Gooch, the future union president. **38.**

In its weakened financial state, the WU was already seeking an amalgamation with the TGWU, an idea floated in the **Record**'s editorial in December 1928 and discussed by the TGWU's EC early in 1929, when Ernest Bevin appeared keen to include the NUAW as well. The **Daily Herald** covered the negotiations : ' The position of the NUAW in relation to the proposed union of the TGWU and WU was considered. Utmost good feeling prevailed. In the

face of the present difficulties, the policy of complete amalgamation was left for future discussion. Agreement was reached which will make for close co - operation between NUAW and WU. Further meetings are to take place in due course, the object of which will be to ensure harmonious working in the future.' **39.**

The NUAW sub - committee had met the previous day, putting a ' series of questions to Messrs Beard and Duncan. Letters were read from Fielding and Parker '. Whether Billy Fielding's letter had criticised his old opponents is not known, but at the end of January deferred to a future meeting.' In the spring, the WU membership voted overwhelmingly to join the TGWU. The following month William Holmes, the new NUAW General Secretary was : ' instructed to approach the TGWU with regard to the new position created by their amalgamation with the WU and their relation to the Central AWB and County Wages Committees.' This approach seems to have been rebuffed. A considerable opportunity for co - operation had been missed and was not to occur again for another fifty two years. **40.**

National leaderships in the Workers' Union and the National Union of Agricultural Workers

This section concentrates on the specific actions of national leaderships within the agricultural workers' unions and shows how they related to events and developments in Shropshire and how they might offer explanations for the growth and distribution of the unions. As already discussed, the rural interests of the WU arose from a need to cut off at source the wage cutting potential of internal migrants to the cities. The agricultural correspondent of the **Shrewsbury Chronicle** confirmed this as late as 1920 : ' There is an Agricultural branch to the National (sic) Workers Union, a body purely urban in its organisation . . . firstly it does not appear to be making great headway among farm labourers, and secondly because the aims of town and country are dissimilar and the WU is not constituted to reconcile them. ' In Shropshire this had a particular resonance because of the personal interest of the WU President, John Beard. Rural organisation in the first half of our period grew from existing branches in the eastern coalfield, which were influenced in turn by larger movements in Birmingham and the Black Country. **41.**

In this growth the ' mixed ' branch of industrial and rural workers was a key weapon of the WU leadership. The formula worked well in the eastern coalfield and its vicinity : ' The rural worker was attracted by the large branch of the WU established at the nearest town to him, and found it beneficial to receive the moral support of workers in other trades banded together with him.' **42.** The WU's organisers could service farmworkers whose demands

were predictable in a seasonal cycle, particularly at haysel and harvest. Directed by Beard, Flavell had become established as organiser for mid - Shropshire district by 1914. However, wartime dislocation caused membership to plummet and Flavell returned to the Black Country. However, he and his successors in the post, with the addition of WU leaders Beard, or W. H. Adamson, M.P. for Cannock, would return to the county for particular purposes ; a May Day speech, meetings of the local Agricultural Wages Board, or Duncan's bye - elections.

The WU's weakness throughout the period was not having enough committed activists to generate grass roots activity, especially in market towns and rural areas. The impression is that most branches were set up by the organisers and without their direct input were prone to wither away, a common difficulty of rural trades unionism. David Pretty suggests a mundane explanation for the WU's ability to expand : ' whereas NUAW organizers struggled manfully on Raleigh bicycles, the Workers' Union evolved a scheme for supplying organizers with motor cycles.' A glance at the WU's **Annual Reports** shows the ephemeral nature of its organisation. As part of their ambitious strategy of advancing on all fronts simultaneously, the WU recruited large numbers of staff in the boom period between 1918 and 1920 ; 40 out of 137 organisers were agricultural. One third of their wages were paid on a bonus system, which depended on how many members were recruited and organisers were quickly dispensed with when the slump came. **43.** The union secured the services of W. H. Edwards, a Shrewsbury carpenter, as its Shropshire officer. Edwards was secretary of the Shrewsbury Trades and Labour Council, and became involved with the WU through organising builders' labourers in the town. After war service, he was taken on as an organiser, initially part - time. Edwards consolidated his position in Shrewsbury, making the branch strong by bringing in ironfoundry workers, woodyard men, ' tobacco workers at Messrs. Singleton ', and County Council roadmen. From his strong base in the Trades Council, and later the NFDDSS, he played an influential role in the Shrewsbury Labour Party, involving Labour figures in the annual WU dinner and social. **44.**

In practice, the national leadership's policy of recruiting a number of different trades was a mixed blessing, as the general slump from the end of 1920 had an indirect effect on most WU members, as well as a more severe effect on members who were farmworkers. So Edwards spent time trying to protect the wage levels of County Council roadmen (paid indirectly by farmers) and timber workers (whose own prosperity was dependent on agriculture), whilst trying to stabilise the wages of farmworkers in branches within a wide radius of the town. Even Edwards' undoubted commitment could not hold his organisation together, particularly after the wage cuts of 1923. The WU realistically concentrated efforts on the town, the coalfield branches and some larger branches in big villages, hoping to

advance again into the countryside when the economic tide turned. Unfortunately for them, by the end of the decade, this proved impossible, and the union disappeared into the TGWU.

Pay was the primary concern, and indeed the raison d'etre of agricultural trades unionism throughout the period. According to Newby, the WU ' had never been as enthusiastic about minimum wage legislation as [George] Edwards and the NUAW ' and ' adopted a completely contrary policy of decentralisation . . . a recognition that farming conditions varied enormously between different areas, each of which would need to formulate its own demands according to what was necessary and feasible in the locality.' *In contrast he saw :* ' The centralisation of the NUAW's administration . . . was to drive it willingly into the arms of a centrally organised state sponsored bargaining institution.' **45.** Yet Shropshire evidence gives a more confusing picture.

Although both unions were prepared to take militant action, to the extent of striking, it was the WU which first accepted, albeit reluctantly, the role of the state. In January 1915, organiser Flavell wrote : ' In the Shrewsbury district we were asked by the Board of Trade to let our differences go to arbitration. We therefore withdrew all notices pending same. . . in view of the strength of our organising in this district we could have pulled off a magnificent victory for the agricultural workers had it not been for the Board of Trade interference.' **46.** It is true that in Shopshire, the NUAW was first in advocating a wages board. The second county conference of March 1915 resolved that the ' Government at once take control of the food supply '. A letter from General Secretary R. B. Walker was published in the **Shrewsbury Chronicle** in January 1917 supporting the government's plan to peg wheat prices, and called for a guaranteed wage of 30s. a week for all farmworkers. However, by this stage of the war the WU had already taken a larger part in the extension of the corporate state, in particular participating in recruiting meetings and in military tribunals. **47.**

James Lunnon of the NUAW was nominated to the county War Agricultural Committee in the summer of 1917, but despite the backing of the Food Production Department, he was rejected as : ' an organiser imported into this county from Gloucestershire would not be suitable.' Nonetheless, the agricultural crisis caused Lunnon's nomination to the first Shropshire Agricultural Wages Board (AWB) in January 1918 to be accepted. By then, however, the Corn Production Act had raised opportunities for both agricultural trade unions, and made the WU agitate for representation on the AWB. Locally, newly discharged W. H. Edwards *successfully lobbied for equal nominations for both unions* (*see p.80*). **48.** It was also Edwards, (rather than Lunnon, who although supported by the FPD, was resisted as an interloping agitator), who was the first representative of organised labour on the Shropshire War Agricultural Committee. The WU also used its journal to publicise cases in which

farmers were prosecuted by the state for paying less than the minimum wage. All of which suggests that it was if anything the WU which was keener to embrace the AWB system than the NUAW. **49.**

Despite its successful integration into government machinery during the war, the WU still retained more of an anti - state view than its rival. This is illustrated by its stand on the Hours of Employment Bill of 1919, which proposed including farmworkers in the general restriction for workers of 48 hours per week. When the NUAW supported the Bill at a meeting of the Shropshire AWB, the WU met separately with the county executive of the NFU and ' requested members to work the number of hours required by individual farmers, as arranged with their own men, over and above 48 hours per week.' **50.** Shrewdly, Edwards and Beard had turned the tables on the NUAW, and far from being a ' townees ' union, the WU made common cause with the NFU. Whilst supporting free collective bargaining, however, the WU was to show that it would accept wage cuts with a fair degree of equanimity, if it felt this was the best that could be achieved for its members. **51.**

Both unions opposed the abolition of the AWB in virtually the same language. The **Record's** leader in July 1921 was entitled ' The Great Betrayal ', probably the first use of the cliché which was to symbolise the history of the post war crisis in British agriculture. In Shropshire, Fielding called it ' The Government's latest treachery ' and erroneously predicted that it ' is only having one effect, namely to cause the farmworkers to rely more on the power of the union '. However, the inability of the voluntary system which replaced it to deliver a living wage to farmworkers, made them question their (modest) expenditure on either union's membership and devise other strategies for suvival, be it co - operation with what remained of the paternalistic gentry, investment of time and energy in allotments rather than union meetings, or migration to the city. **52.**

The WU strategy of co-operating with its new found friends in the NFU in the long run was fatal. Although there may have been some advantages initially for WU members in undermining the NUAW's already feeble 1923 strike, in the 1924 settlement which marked the limit of further wage cuts, it had to make common cause again with its rivals. It is likely that the WU's expediency was confusing to many of its own members, and was distrusted by activists in the wider rural labour movement. By the end of the decade, its overall national weakness had caused it to collapse. **53.** In contrast, the NUAW commitment to the role of the state in fixing low wages, partially revived by the Labour government, allowed it to retain loyalty from a core county membership.

Newby's analysis of the relationship between the NUAW and WU paints the latter as

' not averse to by-passing the Wages Board and using direct action '. He cites ' semi autonomous district organisers . . . in Lancashire, Cheshire and Northumberland in 1919 ', who were prepared ' to use strike action in support of its demands '. **54.** As we have already seen, the WU was prepared to strike, albeit clumsily, in its first campaigns in 1899, and also more effectively, threatening strikes on the outbreak of war. Organiser Flavell claimed, (exaggeratedly) that his strike victory around the coalfield was only prevented by Board of Trade interference (See p.41). However the union was still prepared to strike well into the first year of the war.

By then, the union leadership, and especially Beard, had been strongly in favour of the war effort, and although no evidence directly connecting the two has been found, WU strikes ceased entirely from that time in Shropshire. The ' moderate ', or even ' undercutting ' stance of the WU was confirmed by the union's role in the 1919 harvest strikes in the north - east of the county. The view of Charles Ward of Wem, chairman of the Shropshire NFU was clear :

> There were two men's unions, and the members of one of which, the Agricultural Labourers' Union, they could not get on with as well as the other, and if the farmers gave the Union what they asked today they would start with some fresh demand tomorrow. The members of the other union were much more reasonable in their actions. He had recently had a conversation with one of the leaders of this latter union . . . and subsequent to the conversation he (Mr. Ward) had had words with him, the leader was now doing his level best to keep his men from coming out. **55.**

This view was shared by the NUAW. James Lunnon, speaking after the defeat of the strikers on the Staffordshire side of the border, claimed that : ' The Workers' Union had not backed the labourers . . . this made it difficult for the strikers to do all they would like to '. Mr. James, Secretary of the Cornwall branch of the NUAW was even more bitter : ' The one thing that made the strike hang out had been because some of the labourers belonged to the Workers' Union which was an alliance of employers and employees . . .most greedy, grasping and unpatriotic '. **56.** Madden claims that George Edwards ' method of pursuing wages policy broke new ground in agricultural industrial relations' , with a concentration on a uniform rate in contrast to Joseph Arch who ' pursued guerilla warfare against individual farmers.' Using this line, Newby again argues that the NUAW was hampered by ' the reluctance of the leadership on occasions to sanction strikes and only be driven into open conflict by a more militant rank and file hampered the rapid improvement of wages and conditions.' He also thinks that even the socialist wing of the union typified by general secretary R. B. Walker, was obsessed by ' The centralisation of the NUAW's structure at the expense of a militant policy '. **57.**

But again, Shropshire evidence gives a different picture, with the local NUAW, with full EC sanction, apparently adopting Arch's ' guerilla warfare ', long after it was supposedly abandoned by George Edwards and R.B.Walker The NUAW was on strike in the county in 1914, 1916, 1917, 1919 and 1923. As we have seen (see pp.47 - 49), Lunnon and then Fielding skilfully conducted a series of strikes based in districts where membership was strongest and at propitious times in the farming year, which had the effect of raising wages throughout the county. Given the prevalent low percentage of union membership amongst farmworkers, even in prosperous times, this was a remarkable achievement. Although the apparent labour shortage was moving the workers' way, it took great courage to organise strikes during the war and a mutual respect between local leadership and members. This is illustrated by the confident case made at Lydbury North ; ' they demand 23s. per week (for six day) in wages, 25s. per week including Sundays (minimum), together with all extras including cottage, cider, allowances etc., 6d. per hour overtime for hay harvest, and £4 for corn harvest.' **58**.

Not until the failure of 1923 is there any indication in Shropshire of a ' rank and file ' NUAW militancy where local members demonstrated a different view from the national leadership. Although EC approval was obtained for these movements, Newby's description of the semi - autonomous WU could equally apply in Shropshire to the NUAW. Indeed it was the virtual blacklegging of the WU during the Shropshire and Staffordshire strikes of 1919 and 1923 that was the primary cause of NUAW failure in its locally organised actions.

Newby's idea that the WU was fundamentally decentralised and the NUAW centralised in its structure and leadership is not confirmed by the Shropshire events. Although Fielding's enthusiasm was often curbed by the EC, for example over the proposal to call a county conference in 1919, local activists were often left to run the union's affairs, even in the case of the 1923 strike, directly criticising the EC. The NUAW was a more democratic union, and included a Shropshire representative in election to the EC until 1925. In contrast, John Beard, at least until his move to London in 1925, kept a close eye and a firm hold on the union's affairs in his home patch. His high - handed behaviour in supporting the Munitions and Military Service No. 2 Act, without consulting his members, was angrily criticised by a WU meeting in Birmingham. The WU's swamping of membership of the AWB and the county boards reinforced this centralist tendency. **59**.

The argument postulated by Newby sees the WU as more decentralised, militant and anti - state control of farm wages. By contrast he paints the NUAW as cautious and wedded to a centralised state - defined minimum wage. However the case of Shropshire shows the WU

national leadership as autocratic and prepared to compromise with the state as syndicalism was rapidly transformed into corporatism. The extension of these tactics of compromise to employers, whilst feasible during times of economic prosperity, proved fatal to the union when depression came. The NUAW national leadership's deliberate encouragement of a more responsive and organic local activism gave it a means to survive the agricultural slump, whilst the WU reliance on paid organisers led to collapse.

Whilst Beard's jingoism suited the wartime mood, and his corporatism was in tune with the prevailing view of trades unionism, in the post Armistice era it was Walker's socialism which was part of mainstream labour thinking. The Wrekin and Ludlow bye - elections demonstrated that the WU could not capitalise politically on its high membership, even by adopting that ' moderate ' socialist position which the leadership thought would find favour with the post - war mass electorate. As the WU declined from the early 1920s, Walker was partly able to counteract a similar drop in NUAW membership by active involvement in the TUC, serving on its General Council and becoming President in 1922. Walker's eye was also on the long term political advantages, although these were not to be gained until after 1945. In contrast Beard and Duncan were seen as reactionary and isolated by the rest of the labour movement, and only regained this respect after the enforced merger with the TGWU. **60.**

Local leaderships in the Workers' Union and the National Union of Agricultural Workers

In this section the relative impact of the local leaderships of the WU and NUAW will be examined. It will be argued that in general the NUAW was much more effective than its rival in putting forward its policies and campaigning at the grass roots level. This ability to retain an organic village cadre of activists is a major explanation for the relative success of the NUAW compared to the WU. As well as using the structure of county meetings, Fielding and his committee spent a large proportion of their time organising and addressing village based gatherings. With important issues, such as the crucial wage settlements in 1922 - 23, up to 16 meetings were held. Debate on changes in employment law, such as extension of national insurance to farmworkers, proposed as early as 1928, was also subject to the same treatment, sometimes with outside speakers. In the winter months, Fielding found ' Sunday meetings in the villages, (were) being the most popular and successful '. He claimed to have had 86 meetings in 3 months in 1922. Even in 1923, following the unsuccessful strike, Fielding reported ' On Sundays I have been doing as many as 5 meetings a day, with Weekday evening meetings in all parts of Shropshire. Audiences have come straight from the harvest fields.' **61.**

In contrast, the WU held very few meetings in the villages. Apart from reports of Edwards' speeches at Frodeseley and Four Crosses during the wage reduction in the crisis autumn of 1922, most activity centred around county (and briefly district) delegate meetings, all held in Shrewsbury. Even the October 1923 AWB settlement was announced at one of these meetings. In addition, very often farmworkers' affairs were ousted or overshadowed by meetings to explain already decided policy. It seems that at least NUAW members had an opportunity in their own locality to comment. This gave the NUAW the comparative advantage over the WU of retaining its core of committed activists in the villages and is one explanation of the survival of the NUAW as its rival declined. **62.**

The NUAW skilfully used village meetings to advertise the union's ability to obtain back wages and accident claims to recruit and retain membership. One example is a meeting of the Chirbury branch in October 1922 : ' Mr Bennett presided over a large attendance of farmworkers, their wives and friends, Mr Fielding gave an address on the union and presented a cheque for £200 to Mr G. Pryce in compensation for eye injuries sustained whilst hedging 2 1/2 years ago. Mr Pryce hoped that all workers would not only join but remain loyal members also.' **63**. Cheques were presented by the general secretary when he made yearly visits later in the decade. So in October 1925 at a meeting in the New Inn, Baschurch : ' At the outset R. B. Walker presented a cheque for £400 to a member injured in 1922. The member thanked the union official for having worked so hard in his interests and called on all farmworkers to remain loyal to their union.' According to **The Landworker**, every non-union member present joined up. **64.**

Fielding had a knack of ensuring that the local press covered prosecutions by the Ministry of Agriculture for non - payment of statutory wages. Walker used his presence at Shropshire meetings to claim that the union had secured wage arrears of £10,000 nationally between 1923 - 26, and a figure 10 times as great in compensation claims. Although The Workers' Union **Record** did mention compensation claims at times, this was not as consistent as **The Landworker** 's coverage of the same issue, and the WU successes were not reported in the local press. This ability to demonstrate a practical benefit for its membership is another reason why the NUAW retained a core loyal following in the countryside. Although WU subscriptions were cheaper, they seemed to present little tangible benefit and disappeared into a metropolitan bureaucratic structure. It may also be speculated that NUAW members felt that they were potentially obtaining some of the benefits that had previously been offered by the now failing friendly society branches. **65.** (see pp.181 - 182)

NUAW members also organised their own socials. Fielding reported in January 1921 that :

' Many branches are busy catering for the social side, by arranging social evenings, smoking concerts etc. with the further object of drawing members together.' An example given was that of Tom Hardwick, the Ludlow secretary, arranging ' the Shrewsbury Co - op Glee Party to give a concert to members and wives.' **66.** In the winter of 1924 the ' festive season and social evenings with a brief address ' resulted in a ' fine attendance at branch meetings.' They were used to publicise the ' Prize Draw ' , which financed the new County Benevolent Fund. Whilst Fielding's daughter often provided a piano accompaniment at these events : ' We have discovered hitherto unexpected musical abilities among our members.' Even when a meeting was used for general business, such as that held at the club room of the Sun Inn at Westbury in December 1925, ' the remainder of the evening was devoted to music and songs.' **67.**

Aside from a single ' smoking concert ' held at Four Crosses Inn, Bicton, in March 1921, no comparable social programme was organised in the villages by the WU. (This was in contrast to the widespread use of events by WU described by Nigel Scotland in Gloucestershire) Creating a sense of social belonging had been of importance to the trade union movement in its search for solidarity since its earliest days. It can be concluded that these village events were important in binding potentially unconfident union members to the NUAW and conversely the WU's inability to organise such a programme without the imput of paid organisers was an important cause of the relative success of the NUAW and the decline of the WU. In an age when entertainment was becoming more sophisticated, the NUAW tried hard to create a popular culture for rural trades unionism, though it is arguable whether they could compete with jazz bands, charabanc outings, and the ' talkies'. It is noticeable, and confirms Howkins' findings in Norfolk, that both unions met almost entirely in public houses in Shropshire, underlining the weak link between unionism and nonconformity within the county. **68.**

Larger NUAW events were carefully planned and advertised in **The Landworker**, which by the 1920s became indispensable for running the union locally. ' An organised campaign in Shropshire ', proposed in June 1922, was typical :

1. Branches to set up working committees to visit non - members.
2. A special leaflet with how much the union recovered in compensation etc.
3. Inserts in local papers.
4. Five large demonstrations with the new County banner, plus forty open air village meetings.
5. Five prizes to the members who secure the most new members from 1st May to 31st July with £1 first prize. **69.**

The banner was first proposed in January 1921. ' The branches are now getting busy on the work of raising money to purchase a banner for the county. Our own banner for next year's demonstrations.' A year later; ' £80 clear profit from the prize draw ' was announced, ' our county banner is secured.' The banner appears to have had its first outing during the 1922 May day procession at Shrewsbury. **70.** It is pictured in the March 1926 **Landworker**, and is typical of those made by George Tuthill, the famous London maker. Its central image also survives in a glass negative (see Photographs 7 and 8). In 1922 a large Jacquard silk woven banner, with a central painted scene, complete with poles, finials, cords, carrying case, and insurance, cost about £490. To raise this money was a considerable achievement for badly paid Shropshire farmworkers. Very few NUAW county committees had their own banners as early as this period, even Norfolk's was unveiled in 1922 by George Edwards. Most farmworkers' banners did not appear until after the Second World War. The Shropshire county banner slogans are not at all similar to that of other NUAW banners ; Norfolk's banner for example includes a hymn verse. It may indicate that the county committee deliberately chose more socialist sentiments. Shropshire's banner was an important symbol of pride in union membership, and demonstrated a growing confidence in its own labour movement culture. **71.**

Again, the WU was relatively unsuccessful compared with its rival. In May 1925, perhaps in response to the NUAW's own efforts, it was announced at a meeting of the Shrewsbury district branches that : ' an appeal was to be made for a new banner.' However, to judge from a photograph of the WU tent at the Three Shires Show in 1925, reproduced in the **Record**, which shows a more home spun banner, with Hereford lettering, the appeal appears to have been unsuccessful (see Photograph 9). Surviving banners from urban WU branches emphasise the rural interests of the union by displaying the slogan ' Farm, Field and Factory '. This wishfully overestimated the proportion of its membership in the countryside. All of which seems to aptly symbolise its position in relation to its rival. **72.**

Another component of the large union meeting was the brass band, and the NUAW often used the Grinshill band. This seems to have started as an ex - service band, as an offshoot of the local National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Soldiers and Sailors, and coming from a village and a district where the union was strong, it is likely that NUAW members were among the bandsmen. The change of name to ' Prize Band ', by 1922, probably indicates that the band did not affiliate to the British Legion on its formation (see pp. 130 - 131). The NUAW seems to have developed a sense of occasion much better than its WU rivals. **The Landworker** was used extensively by the union to publicise its activities in a very detailed way, with Fielding's own Shropshire column. (He may have also persuaded the **Shrewsbury Chronicle** to cater for an important segment of its readers by introducing a

short lived NUAW column in 1925.) **73.** The Workers' Union **Record** had a farmworkers' feature, but this concentrated on national issues and contained little detailed information on Shropshire, or any other county. The paper's content swamped farmworkers in more urban concerns.

By 1924 Fielding used a different tactic to publicise the union - ' a special feature being the 200 long posters which adorned the walls and gateposts of every village and hamlet in Shropshire, exposing the farmers and their mean offer of 6 1/2 d. per hour - he was confident that many of those who left the union are now returning.' **74.** Perhaps the greatest boost for the NUAW in Shropshire was the holding of several large yearly outdoor rallies which used many of the tactics already discussed - banner, brass band and procession. An outside speaker was an additional attraction, ranging from sympathetic M. P.s like A.A. Purcell or Cyril Jones of Wrexham, the General Secretary or other prominent members of the EC (like Mrs Ruth Uzzel, who came for two years after Walker's resignation), to officials from other unions, particularly the NUR. **75.**

Three particular series of district rallies were important to the local leadership of the Shropshire NUAW. In the north, in early August from 1922, a rally was held at Ellesmere, which drew in members from neighbouring Cheshire, and from Denbigh and Flint in North Wales. Further south, an annual Workers' Sports Day was staged at Yorton, a union stronghold of the ' sandstone ' villages, every June from 1919. By 1924, ' Upwards of 200 members, their wives and friends, enjoyed races, roundabouts and coconut shies ', with the Wem Comrades' Band playing for dancing in the evening. In a brief address, Fielding ' appealed very eloquently to those who were not members of the NUAW to be as good trades unionists as they were good sportsmen '. In the south west of the county, the union from 1918 held a joint annual meeting with the NUR at the railway junction town of Craven Arms, with train - loads of supporters coming from Herefordshire and nearby Radnorshire. Here, in 1923, Fielding and James Lunnon gave ' rousing and inspiring addresses . . . received by hundreds of workers and their wives with great enthusiasm. A collection was then taken for the banner fund.' **76.** The union had seemingly convinced the **Shrewsbury Chronicle** that its readers would be interested in accounts of these events. Reading about doing things for themselves, and being seen publically to do so on the county stage probably reinforced the sense of commitment from NUAW activists. They also gave NUAW members a sense of loyalty wider than that of the village branch to the union's district and county structures. Here it could be reinforced by contact with other trades unionists, particularly from the NUR.

The only event of a comparable nature held by the WU was the Annual Dinner and Social of the Shrewsbury branches, which took place every February from 1924 in Thorne's Hall Cafe (owned by the local Co - operative Society). Here the speakers were WU officials, the occasional WU sponsored M.P.s (like W. T. Kelly of Rochdale or W. M. Adamson of Cannock), and leaders of the Shrewsbury Labour Party, and there is no evidence that farmworkers from the villages outside the county town ever took part. **77.** The only county rally was organised, somewhat belatedly, with John Beard as the main speaker, at Ellerdine in 1925. Although reported, with photographs (see Photographs 10 and 11) in The **Record**, it was ignored by the local press. It can be concluded that the NUAW was better at getting their members acting for themselves and obtaining publicity for their activities than the WU. In contrast WU officials spoke of ' leading **them** out of thraldom, poverty and degradation ', ' the war teaching **them** value of organisation ' and ' pulled off a magnificant victory **for** the farmworkers' When the WU's financial difficulties caused organisers to be dismissed, local activists did not come forward to replace them and the union ceased abruptly. **78.**

Whilst retaining a basic loyalty to the Labour Party, both the WU and the NUAW developed particular political flavours of their own. Before the outbreak of war, the WU still retained an element of it syndicalist past. The first mention of the union in the local press concerned a meeting called on behalf of Jim Larkin. At the first May Day celebrations held at Shrewsbury in 1914, the WU provided the main speakers, as well as marchers, in the shape of the striking Whixall peat cutters, for whom a collection was made. May Day was suspended for the duration of the war, but from 1919, when Fielding first appeared in the county, making a fiery speech which upset the NFU, the NUAW eclipsed the WU as the more enthusiastic participant. The WU only provided speakers in 1921 and 1923, and by 1928 Shrewsbury May Day appears to have declined. In that year the **Shrewsbury Chronicle** waspishly referred to ' a depressing exhibition of class antagonism. We were spared the procession this year. ' In 1929 the festival consisted of an indoor meeting during the general election campaign. **79.**

Before the war, the WU had some success in recruiting women workers in particular trades. The 1912 strike of Black Country women chain makers achieved considerable notoriety, and this concern for women continued with groups like the blanket makers of Witney, Oxfordshire, and the textile workers of Gloucestershire. Surprisingly, perhaps, there is no evidence in Shropshire that women workers were targeted in any way by the WU and no women activists from the union have been identified. Madden claims that R.B.Walker refused to allow NUAW organisers to recruit women, particularly in wartime. But the Shropshire NUAW may have put more effort into attracting women, as the joint meeting with the NUR at Ludlow in November 1917 had ' a considerable number of ladies in the audience.'

The NUR local President also later advised : ' everyone to stick to their union, now more than ever and to get their wives interested in what he said was the only movement likely to benefit all their class.' **80.**

However, this and other references suggest that women's participation in unions was unusual, and indicated that by and large, the social mores of full time working women remained intact. The unions were relatively unattractive to women, and unconcerned to recruit them except as adjuncts to make their husbands better activists. As late as 1928 Fielding could report on the visit by the new General Secretary, Bill Holmes : ' An interesting feature of these meetings has been the presence of many women, showing a new interest in union and Labour work. Women were not often available to the union as wives supportive of the husbands' efforts.' Sometimes women were active in meetings and social events. Occasionally particular individuals are glimpsed, like Mrs.R.Smith, landlady of the Railway Inn, Yorton, who presented the prizes at the 5th NUAW Workers' Sports Day, or Helen Boulton, garage proprietress, who loaned an orchard for the joint NUR/NUAW annual demonstration in Craven Arms, and Mrs Walker of Much Wenlock, who hosted a meeting with James Lunnon and was presented with an illuminated address for services to the branch. **81.**

Although the strength of the NUAW in Shropshire was in its branches and committed local activists, this is not to say that the full time organisers were less hard working than those of the WU. As we have seen, Lunnon, as national officer, devoted a great deal of time, until his transfer to London, to what was the most profitable county for the union after Norfolk. He was assisted by Tom Mackley, and from May Day 1919, by Billy Fielding. The appointment of full time staff as county organisers was different from similar jobs within the WU. Although during times of recession, the NUAW organiser was required to range far and wide beyond Shropshire, the county ideal was still aspired to, and reverted to when good times returned in the 1940s. Fielding, although originating near Rotherham, was resident in Shrewsbury for nearly forty years and became identified with the county, a well trusted and long suffering combination of scribe, social worker and political agent, typical of the union's employees. Fielding gave a frank inkling of his lot in a letter to F.E.Green, soon after arriving in Shrewsbury : ' I think every one will agree with me that our life is not exactly on a bed of roses. We are moving about every day from village to village in all kinds of weather. With strange lodgings almost every night, and correspondence following us about which has to be dealt with under great difficulties - very often not able to secure a diet to keep one fit and well '. **82.**

The isolated nature of much of the county compounded these difficulties, making the relationship between the organiser and the branch activists crucial. The size of branches varied. Some like Lydbury North or Ackleton were over one hundred strong, and others, slightly smaller, like Yorton in the north, or Craven Arms in the south, became responsible for organising periodic events which were important in rallying support for the union over a wide area. 105 locations have been identified as places where NUAW existed at one time or another, very often as the only representative of the labour movement. Although a district structure seems to have existed intermittently, it was not effective until the 1940s, and withered away in a similar fashion to the WU's short lived Mid - Shropshire district of 1915. **83.** By contrast, the delegate county conference, meeting yearly or more often at times, was a valuable weapon in focussing activities in the good times, such as the 1920 conference of 80 branches, (the crowning achievement of the union), as well as a way of providing solace, as at the 1930 conference which could only muster 32 delegates (see pp. 51 and 56).

Another useful way of rallying support for the NUAW was the holding of joint conferences at various border towns in conjunction with the committees of neighbouring counties. Joint Shropshire and Staffordshire meetings were held to promote the Gnosall Strike during 1919, and continued at Newport the following July. In the spring of 1920 a joint meeting, described as the third annual meeting, was held at Ludlow with the Herefordshire men and the local NUR. (It was where the union's national policy for a £3 a week minimum wage was unveiled and was probably instrumental in loosening the early hold which the WU had in Herefordshire through the efforts of Sydney Box.) Although NUAW branches continued in north Herefordshire (see p. 69), the county was still designated as a WU sphere of influence in the division made by the TUC before the 1925 rural campaign. The annual demonstrations held at Ellesmere in the north of Shropshire were also likely to have attracted members from neighbouring counties with the object of increasing the feeling of solidarity within the union. **84.**

Whilst many WU branches owed their existence to the efforts of the full time organisers, and found it difficult to sustain longevity except as part of a ' mixed branch ', with industrial support, the strength of the NUAW was in its village branches, and in the activists who maintained the union through difficult as well as fruitful years. A trawl of the local and union press and national records of both unions has shown a much higher number of unpaid union activists from the NUAW, with nearly 60 in Shropshire identified, compared with only 10 from the WU. Sadly, because oral history, with the passage of time, has not been a particularly fruitful source for this study, these people remain largely opaque. **85.** The geographical pattern of union development, particularly in the NUAW was partly determined by the efforts of many of these individuals (see pp. 69 - 70). The growth of the union in isolated areas of

the county may be explained by particular activists, and likewise the demise of branches may be due to the migration, frustration or loss of interest of individual farmworkers.

Nevertheless, it is possible to pinpoint key people, especially within the NUAW. John Porter of Calverhall was active with organiser Tom Mackley around Whitchurch in 1914 - 16, and may have died in the war since all references to him, and the Calverhall branch, cease after the latter date. Tom Forrester of Yorton, a smallholder, and believer in ' class struggle ', was chairman of the county committee, and a member of the national EC between 1920 and 1924. At the centre of the 1923 strike, he is recalled as important to the NUAW organisation in neighbouring Hadnall, and was clearly a major factor in the strength of the union in the ' sandstone ' villages north of Shrewsbury. **86.** This is not to say that the WU was devoid of grassroots workers. One example is Algernon Pearce (see Photograph 10), ' a very energetic secretary, ' and local fixer for Beard, at Ellerdine, who served on the Shropshire AWB and was active from at least 1915 to 1931. Another was Richard Breeze, a Shrewsbury builder's labourer, brought in to preside over WU meetings in Bayston Hill and other nearby villages, although it is significant that the union could not find a farmworker. **87.**

Tantalising mini - biographies with 2 or 3 scraps of information about union and Labour Party activities can be found for several dozen men in different parts of the county. Although the actions of these activists probably could have provided the most important explanation for the overall growth and distribution for agricultural trades unionism in Shropshire, the patchy information about them makes it impossible now to establish a direct casual relationship.

The NUAW did make a political impact at local level. At Grinshill, Councillor R. Smith was returned to Wem District Council which ' struck a blow at the employers owned cottage ' through ' the definitely adopted plans for their housing scheme . . .four cottages with parlour, kitchen, scullery, three bedrooms and a bathroom upstairs. The aim of the Labour Party was to provide every man with a house in which he could reside independent of his employer.' A flavour of the way a rural Labour culture had developed was revealed : ' Oswestry Divisional Labour Party held a delightful rally and picnic at Grinshill Hill with a public meeting in the evening with Dr. Marion Phillips and Tom Morris.' (Morris was a miner and Labour county councillor for Whittington, a village between Oswestry and Shrewsbury with a NUAW branch.) **88.**

Activists like Tom Hardwick, typified the commitment of individuals in this period. As well as working for the NUR and NUAW, and later being adopted as Prospective Parliamentary Candidate, he also represented Labour on Ludlow Town Council. He successfully moved that council house rents should be reduced in line with wage reductions. **89. The**

Landworker proudly recorded the other electoral successes of its members. In May 1921 it reported : ' Brother A. Thomas, has become the first Labour member of the UDC. Local members are elated with this success, as the opposition was a ' gentleman - farmer '. A. T. Thomas was the moderate secretary of the Oswestry Divisional Labour Party, and presided over the Annual NUAW Ellesmere demonstration in 1922 stating : ' While the union was out to help the workers, it did not advocate disloyalty to the masters.' Thomas was followed a year later by county committee member, R. Cank of Yorton, and B. Smith of Edgmond, who were elected to their respective rural district councils. Again in contrast, the WU does not seem to have had contested any rural council seats for Labour.

Although Shropshire did not produce the large and sustained rural Labour Party presence which was found in Norfolk, at certain times and in certain localities it did approach the ' rural radicalism ' postulated by Howkins. **90.** Billy Fielding, in an example of national leadership exerting pressure on local leadership, was discouraged himself by the NUAW EC from pursuing a county council seat. This did not prevent him from supporting his rival W. H. Edwards' local government career, although this too was unsuccessful, illustrating the curious way in which both unions could bury their differences, and promote the Labour Party, and even co - operate as in the 1925 Rural campaign, so soon after their major conflict. **91.**

Conclusion

It is clear that the relative success of the NUAW compared to the WU in Shropshire can be attributed to a better structure and tactical grasp. In village meetings, socials, sports days, large rallies and inter - county conferences the NUAW succeeded in defining a better strategy than the WU. In politics the NUAW was more mainstream than its rival, and established a successful local Labour party. The NUAW's more committed activists gave it a wider presence throughout the county and an opportunity to develop a ' rural radicalism '. Although the WU tactic of ' mixed branches ' continued to be plausible close to its industrial strength, it could not achieve the long term impact of the NUAW deep in the countryside. WU organisers, although as committed in times of economic growth, were more transient than those of the NUAW, who became better identified with the county of Shropshire and possibly that ' Shropshire patriotism ' postulated in Chapter 7. This gave the NUAW an additional advantage both in relation to the WU and in the overall survival and impact of agricultural trades unionism in the county.

Overall, it can be concluded that national and local leaderships had an important role in explaining particularly the growth and decline of agricultural trades unionism in Shropshire. The significance of the county to the WU national leadership was increased by John Beard's

special interest and is parallelled by the importance of Shropshire to the early NUAW. This almost pointless conflict, covered above, weakened both unions. In Shropshire it was nearly always the WU, carried forward by its own frantic expansion, which was prepared to compromise with employers to the point of strike breaking. Nationally, the NUAW leadership was not entirely blameless, demonstrating intransigence in negotiations over co - operation in 1918 and amalgamation in 1929.

The deliberate decision of the WU to replace its anti - state syndicalism with corporate patriotism in 1914 was rapidly felt in Shropshire (and every locality where it organised). The extension of this philosophy from compromise with the state to compromise with employers soon coloured local activities and led eventually to failure both on the political and economic fronts. Although the WU's ' mixed branches ' were successful in retaining and supporting local organised farmworkers, they did not have any part in negotiating wages with farmers. The compromise strategy of the WU was also flawed at local level when its very integrity was questioned by other rural labour activists and probably explains the lack of any relationship between the WU and NUR. The WU's policy can be contrasted with the greater commitment fron the local lay leaderships of the NUAW. These were encouraged by the national leadership of the NUAW through greater flexibility and autonomy in creating the village structures, county organisations and social events which enabled it to weather the post 1921 crisis. Although evidence is lacking, the distribution of agricultural trades unionism in Shropshire may also be largely explained by the conscious actions and individual talents of local union members.

1. Groves op.cit. pp.128 and 245.
2. Selley op.cit. pp.161 - 163. Also in describing John Phipps' Dairy Workers' Union, Selley fails to point out that this was a break away from the NUAW which eventually joined the WU. Green op.cit. pp.201 and 323.
3. Scotland (Gloucestershire) op.cit. pp. 98 and 147. Conversation with David Pretty 22.6.96, although in his book he refers to the WU and NUAW as being ' rivals ', with the WU having ' stolen a march on the NALRWU ' (p.104), and the support given partially to the NUAW by the NUR. (pp.73 and 113)
4. Edwards op.cit. p.198.
5. Hyman op.cit. pp. 99, 102, 103 and 118.
6. Newby op.cit. pp. 214 - 229. Newby bases his argument on a simplification of Michael Madden's Ph.D. thesis.
7. NUAW Records (Institute of Agricultural History) EC Minutes 13.12.13 and 9.5.14.

These reports probably prompted George Edwards' first appearance in Shropshire as a roving organiser early in 1914 (see p.46). Mackley's area as national organiser included Shropshire at this stage.

8. Ibid 1.12.17 and 13.4.18. For the involvement of the WU in military tribunals in Ellesmere, and Shrewsbury RDC's and the Shropshire Appeals Tribunal. For an example of preferential treatment for the servants of upper class people see **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 2.6.16 where a butler was exempted ' on grounds of hardship '.

9. TUC Annual Report 1918 pp. 24 - 26. Lunnon's address is given as Shrewsbury in the report, for Mackley see 7. above, Beard was from Shropshire (see p.37), and Duncan organised in the county, and was to stand in the two Wrekin bye - elections of 1920.

10. NUAW Records Organising and Political Committee 11/12. 7.19 and 18.10.28. Dallas was the architect of the WU takeover of the AWB. In Northamptonshire the WU had no representatives on the Agricultural Wages Committee, with 75 NUAW branches dominating the county.

11. Modern Records Centre, TGWU Records, MSS 36 A62, 21, 16 - 23, 66/1, 292/85, 6, 31, 52, 45 - 46 and 85. The unions were the ISTC, ASE, TGWU, NSFU and the Weavers' Association. Alf Stubbs was working for the NUAW again by the time of the 1945 General Election when he won Cambridgeshire for the Labour Party after six attempts! A Cambridge Town Councillor, he was a ' folk figure ' of the author's childhood. For Findlay see MRC TUC Records 85.49 T 29. In the post war period the WU also poached members from NALGO, with their Ilford and Bermondsey branches seceding en bloc. (See Alec Spoor **White Collar Union - 60 Years of NALGO** (1967) p.73.)

12. Hyman op.cit.pp. 100 - 102, Philip Williamson (ed.) **The Modernisation of Conservative Politics ; The Diaries and Letters of William Bridgeman 1904 - 1935** (1988) p.103, David Martin **Charles Duncan** in John Saville and Joyce Bellamy **Dictionary of Labour Biography** Vol.II (1974) p.123, **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 19.11.15 and 5.11.15.

13. Armstrong op.cit. pp.96 - 99, a ' revisionist ' view of working women is presented in Eve Hosttettler **Gourlay Steell and the Sexual Division of Labour** History Workshop Journal 4. Autumn 1977, and revised again, sensibly pointing out the enormous regional differences, by Howkins op.cit. **Reshaping** pp.102 - 107. Madden op.cit. p.37 claims that R.B.Walker refused to allow NUAW organisers to recruit women.

14. Edwards op.cit. pp.190 - 192, Pamela Horn **Rural Life in England in the First World War** p.117 (1984), NUAW Records B VI 1 Conference Report 1916 and **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 26.3.15.

15. Kenneth Dallas **George Dallas**, entry in Saville and Bellamy op.cit. Vol.IV (1977) pp.70 - 71. Hyman op.cit. pp.100 - 102. George Edwards, to be fair, was also an independent member

(Edwards op.cit. p.197) and Newby op.cit. p.214.

16. SRO Shropshire County Branch NFU Minutes 4531/3 3.6.19, 8.5.20 and 1.6.20. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 11.6.20. NUAW Records EC Minutes 19.9.19. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 17.6.21 and 12.5.22.

17. Madden op.cit. p.59.

18. See NUAW Records EC Minutes 8.10.20, **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 30.1.20. (To be fair Beard added that the farmers would be expected to pay overtime) and 31.10.19.

19. NUAW Records 10.11.19 and **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 23.1.20.

20. Workers' Union **Record** August 1920. Newby op.cit. p.231. NUAW EC Minutes 8.7.20. Despite this tension, the NUAW Records EC Minutes 8.10.20, records two informal conferences between the two unions in the autumn of 1920.

21. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 1.12.22. For Evans' wartime role see Ibid 3.3.16 and 18.12.16.

22. NUAW Records EC Minutes 16.11.21, **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 1.12.22, and SRO 4531/36 NFU Shropshire Branch Monthly Magazine January 1923.

23. **The Landworker** May 1923. Even in Norfolk where the strike was successful, the union could not prevent the victimisation of many of its activists, see Howkins pp. 173 - 75. NUAW Records EC 16.3.23.

24. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 30.3.23. Ironically in East Anglia, Suffolk WU members were caught up in a strike alongside the Norfolk dispute, the WU **Record** of April 1923 covers this in detail, though not the events in Shropshire or Norfolk.

25. **Wellington Journal** 10.3.23 and 17.3.23. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 6.7.23.

26.Selley p.144 and Green op.cit. pp.238 - 40.

27. Some WU activists did go over, e.g. J.J.Terrett of Rochdale, who stood in the ' khaki election ' see **The British Citizen and Empire Worker** 30.11.18. SRO 4531/3 NFU Shropshire Branch Minute book 1917 -18 minutes of meeting on 21.12.18. The National Democratic and Labour Party ran Parliamentary candidates in Wolverhampton, one of whom, Rev. J.A.Shaw held a meeting in Shifnal in Shropshire, see **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 15.8.19.

28. TUC **Annual Report** 1918. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 20.9.18, 13.11.18, 9.5.19 and 6.5.21.

29. Ibid. 23.1.20, 30.1.20, 27.2.20, 13.2.20, 26.10.20, 5.11.20 and 12.11.20. The WU **Record** published a favourable review of Edwards' autobiography **From Crowscaring to Westminister** in December 1922. Edwards had partly shared the ' patriotism ' of the WU leadership during the war.

30. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 7.6.29. Ann Holt **Edith Picton - Turbervill** entry in Saville and Bellamy op.cit. Vol.IV (1977) p.138.

31. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 30.3.23, 16.3.23, 13.4.23 and 6.4.23. NUAW Records EC Minutes 16.3.23, Organising and Political Committee Minutes 27.3.23 and Press Cuttings

Book D II - 8. No record of Walker speaking during the bye - election has been found. For an overview of the result see Ross McKibbin **The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910 - 1924** (1974) p.202.

32. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 13.4.23.

33. **The Landworker** May 1923 and NUAW Records EC Minutes 20.8.24.

34. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 1.11.29. NUAW Records Organising and Political Committee Minutes 17.2.25 and 22.12.25, record that Fielding was forbidden to allow his name to go nomination as a County Council candidate.

35. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 9.1.25. Madden op.cit. p.110, suggests that the Labour government disingenously used ' the difference between the unions concerned ' as an excuse for the lack of a national minimum wage in its 1924 Agricultural Wages Act.

36. NUAW Records EC Minutes 16.9.25, TUC **Annual Report** 1925 pp. 240 - 241.
(Shropshire was not in either area, although Herefordshire was one of the five WU counties.)

37. TUC **Annual Report** 1926 pp. 155 - 156, 167 - 169 and 499 - 501.

38. Walker's departure received only a brief mention in **The Landworker** and subsequently has been shrouded in a certain amount of mystery. One activist claims that Walker, having left his wife for another woman, was framed by the ' Methodist ' faction around George Edwards. (Bill Curtis b.1897, Salhouse, Norfolk, interview with author 18.2.83.) The NUAW Records EC Minutes 21.3.28 indicate that Walker was allowed to resign after admitting minor financial irregularites, like claiming duplicate expenses for attending the same meeting from the union and the TUC. The odd phrasing of the minutes and the involvement of William Holmes in the incident, a Norfolk ally of Edwards', who succeeded Walker as General Secretary, gives Curtis' story some plausibility. After leaving the NUAW, Walker, like many farmworkers before him, was said to have emigrated to Australia. MRC TUC Records 85.49 T 29 3.3.25, NUAW Records EC Minutes 14.12.28 and MRC TGWU EC Minutes 11.1.29 and 18.2.29.

39. Daily Herald 22.12.28.

40. NUAW Records EC Minutes 21.12.28, 18.1.29 and 14.6.29. MRC TGWU EC Minutes 22.5.29. The vote was 169,507 to 21,094. Madden op.cit. p.216, stresses the continuing conflict between the two unions after amalgamation.

41. See Hyman op.cit. chapter 3, especially pp. 51 - 52.

42. M.R.C. TUC Records 85. 49 T 29 (WU v ALU). The phrase was used in this instance by the WU to justify their ' poaching ', in an adjudication by the TUC, 4.6.18.

43. Pretty op.cit. p. 119 and Hyman op.cit. p. 149

44. For Edwards' biography see WU **Record** May 1924. There is some confusion over the length of his war service. According to the **Record,** he was still in Shrewsbury in July 1915. He was re - elected as Trades Council secretary in January 1916, and an unnamed Trades

Council secretary, who may not have been Edwards, given patchy newspaper reporting, was refused exemption from military service in March 1916. He was back in the town in February 1917 (see **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 28.1.16, 3.3.16, and 10.2.17.). It is unlikely, given his high profile that he could have invented his war service, and the discrepancy may be because he had ' attested ' under the Derby scheme.

45. Newby op.cit. p. 229 - 230, quoting Madden op.cit.p.33 and the NUAW EC Minutes : ' the custom of differential wage rates should give place to a uniform living wage.'

46. WU **Annual Report** 1915. This may relate to the rightward shift of the union's national leadership. Note the *for* the agricultural workers, and not *by*!

47. NUAW Records B VI 2. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 5.1.17, for the WU's role in the state see ibid 18.2.16 and 3.3.16.

48. SRO SC51/1A1/1 Minutes of the Shropshire War Agricultural Committee. 1.5.17, 21.7.17. and 18.8.17, NUAW Records EC Minutes 5.6.18, **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 4.1.18.

49. WU **Record** September 1919, March 1920 and May 1921.

50. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 31.10.19.

51. Ibid 30.1.20 and 6.2.20. (Although the common cause did not extend to persuading farmers to vote for Duncan in the Wrekin bye - election of that month!) See also SRO 4531/35 Shropshire branch NFU Monthly Magazine January 1920, which specifically attacked the NUAW.

52. WU **Record** July 1921 and **The Landworker** July 1921. Evidence is scarce on the last point, see the discussions in Chapter 7 on migration and cottagers.

53. For the 1924 settlement see **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 24.2.24. The WU's expediency may be the major reason for the lack of a fraternal relationship with the NUR.

54. Newby op.cit. p. 231.

55. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 12.9.19.

56. Ibid 26.9.19

57. Newby op.cit. pp. 233 - 234 and Madden op.cit.p. 11.

58. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 2.6.16.

59. Newby op.cit. p. 231, NUAW Records EC Minutes 22.3.19 and see John Bince's letter to the **Wellington Journal** 24.3.23. See **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 16.6.16 for the Birmingham meeting. (It may be that the examples referred to, but not cited by, Newby were untypical because of geographical remoteness, in the case of Northumberland, or had left wing officials, which is quite likely in the case of Lancashire.)

60. For Walker's wider labour movement role see **Labour's Who's Who** (1924). The NUAW had served on the TUC Parliamentry Committee as early as 1910, see Madden op.cit.p. 25. The NUAW used the occasion of the unveiling of a memorial arch at the Wesleyan chapel in Tolpuddle in 1912 to cultivate its position as **the** union for rural workers.

(See Green **English Agricultural Labourers** op.cit.p.183 - 184.) This was also cemented by the role they were given by the TUC in the Tolpuddle Martyr centenary celebrations of 1934 for which see the discussion in John Gorman **Images of Labour** (1985) p.47.

61. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 22.9.22 and 29.1.26, **The Landworker** July 1923, November 1922 and September 1923.

62. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 22.9.22, 29.2.22, 19.10.23 and 26.10.23.

63. **The Landworker** October 1922. In the same year other cheques for eye injuries were presented at Rodington (£110), and Montford Bridge (£100), see **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 8.9.22.

64. Ibid 9.10.25 and **The Landworker** November 1925.

65. For examples see **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 4.1.27, 21.1.27, 28.1.27, 8.4.27 and 29.4.27. (For a discussion of Shropshire friendly societies see above pp.178 - 180.)

66. **The Landworker** January 1921.

67. Ibid. February 1924 and March 1925 and **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 4.12.25.

68. Ibid 4.3.21, for Gloucestershire see Scotland op.cit. p. 107, and Howkins op.cit. p. 179 - 180.

69. **The Landworker** June 1922.

70. Ibid January 1921 and July 1922, **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 12.5.22.

71. **The Landworker** March 1926, the glass negative is in the John Gorman collection at the National Museum of Labour History, Manchester. John Gorman **Banner Bright** (1986) pp. 53 - 54, Catalogue of George Tuthill's 1919 (National Museum of Labour History Collection) and photograph of Norfolk NUAW banner unveiling 1922 (Norfolk Museums Service Collection). It may be that the slogan : ' Landworkers You Feed the World, See that the World Feeds You ', was suggested by William Fielding, who was an ardent socialist, but this is speculation.

72. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 5.5.25 and WU **Record** August 1925. The slogan is used on the Greenwich and Holloway branch banners in the National Museum of Labour History Collection. These branches would have been unlikely to include farmworkers within their ranks.

73. **The Landworker** July 1922 and June 1924, **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 28.7.22, **The Landworker** November 1922, **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 25.9.10 and 23.10.25.

74. **The Landworker** December 1923, NUAW EC Minutes 11.11.24 and 25/26.7.23.

75. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 29.1.26 amd 20.6.24, **The Landworker** July 1925, August 1928 and October 1928.

76. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 4.8.23, 20.6.24 and 22.6.23.

77. WU **Record** March 1925, **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 4.2.27 and 3.2.28.

78. WU **Record** August 1925. (The photographs are the only indentified images of organised farmworkers in this period and one also contains a railwayman in uniform, the **only** evidence

located of any relationship between the WU and the NUR in Shropshire. The quotations are from WU organisers R.O.Hornagold, WU **Record** January 1914 and A.Flavell, **Annual Report** 1915, WU **Record** September 1917.

79. There were Labour Sundays in 1912 and 1913, although neither union appears to have been involved . See **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 10.5.12, 7.11.13, 8.5.14, 9.5.19., 7.5.20, 6.5.20, 6.5.21, 12.5.22, 11.5.23, 9.5.24, 8.5.25, 7.5.26, 6.5.27, 11.5.28, and 10.5.29. (See also below p.113.)

80. Madden op.cit. p.37. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 23.11.17 and 22.12.22.

81. Ibid. 20.6.24, 22.6.23 and 20.6.24, (Mrs Smith was probably related to Cllr. Smith of Grinshill, see above p.101 and entry in Kelly's **Directory** 1922), and **The Landworker** November 1922.

82. For the county structure of the NUAW, see Groves op.cit. especially Chapter VI, and for a more jaundiced view, Newby op.cit. Chapter 4. Many of the NUAW organisers were Norfolk men. Fielding's quote is from Green op.cit. p. 277. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 21.3.58 and Pretty op.cit. p.170.

83. NUAW Records B VIII 2 List of Members.

84. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 12.9.19, 21.5.20, 30.7.20. and 4.8.22. TUC **Annual Report** 1925.

85. The survey involved a systematic search through the **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 1900 to 1903, 1912 to 1930, WU **Record** 1913 to 1929 and **The Labourer** and its successor **The Landworker** 1915 to 1930. In addition the **Wellington Journal**, the **Kidderminister Times** and other local papers have been used intermittently. Other locations have come from the primary sources, particularly the central records and **Annual Reports** of both unions.

86. For Porter see NUAW Records EC Minutes 18.4.14, 31.10.14 and 23.12.16, B VI 2 Report of 2nd. Shropshire County Conference, where Porter was a speaker. Forrester features in many pieces in the **Shrewsbury Chronicle, The Landworker**, and EC Minutes between 1920 and 1924, when he lost his place on the EC. He seems to have remained a key figure in the Shropshire NUAW, throughout the 1930s, as recalled by Doris Evans, whose father Philip was branch secretary at Shawbury. Letters to author 22.3.95. and 4.4.95.

87. For Pearce see Workers' Union **Record** December 1915, WU **Annual Report** 1918, **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 24.10.24, SRO Wrekin Labour Party Minutes 1931, List of Delegates. For Breeze see **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 1.10.20, 18.2.21. and 28.10.21.

88. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 21.11.19 and **Labour Organiser** July 1922. (For Morris' other activities see above p.117.)

89. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 24.2.22 and 3.3.23 and F.W.S.Craig **British Parliamentary Election Results 1918 - 1945** (1977) p. 450.

90. **The Landworker** May 1921 and June 1922, **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 4.8.22, NUAW Records EC Minutes 23.2.22 and Howkins op.cit. p.177.

91. NUAW Records B III 2/3 Organising and Political Sub - committee minutes 2.12.25 and 1.11.29, **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 22.11.18 and 24.5.29

Chapter 5 - Explanations centring on the wider working class movements

This chapter will examine the importance of the wider labour movement in the growth and distribution of agricultural trades unionism in Shropshire. Nationally since the emergence of rural unions in the nineteenth century, the wider labour movement had been keen to help in their development. As was discussed in the last chapter, urban trade unions were concerned to protect their living standards from the possibility of being undercut by unorganised rural labour. There was an altruistic strand too, based perhaps on the memory of rural exploitation perceived by trade unionists whose own origins were in the countryside. This feeling gave rise to demonstrations and support from the time of the Tolpuddle Martyrs through Arch's agitation of the 1870s, to the TUC grants of the Edwardian period. However in practice, it will be argued that in Shropshire, the rural labour movement was an indigenous effort and received little help from urban trades unionists and socialists.

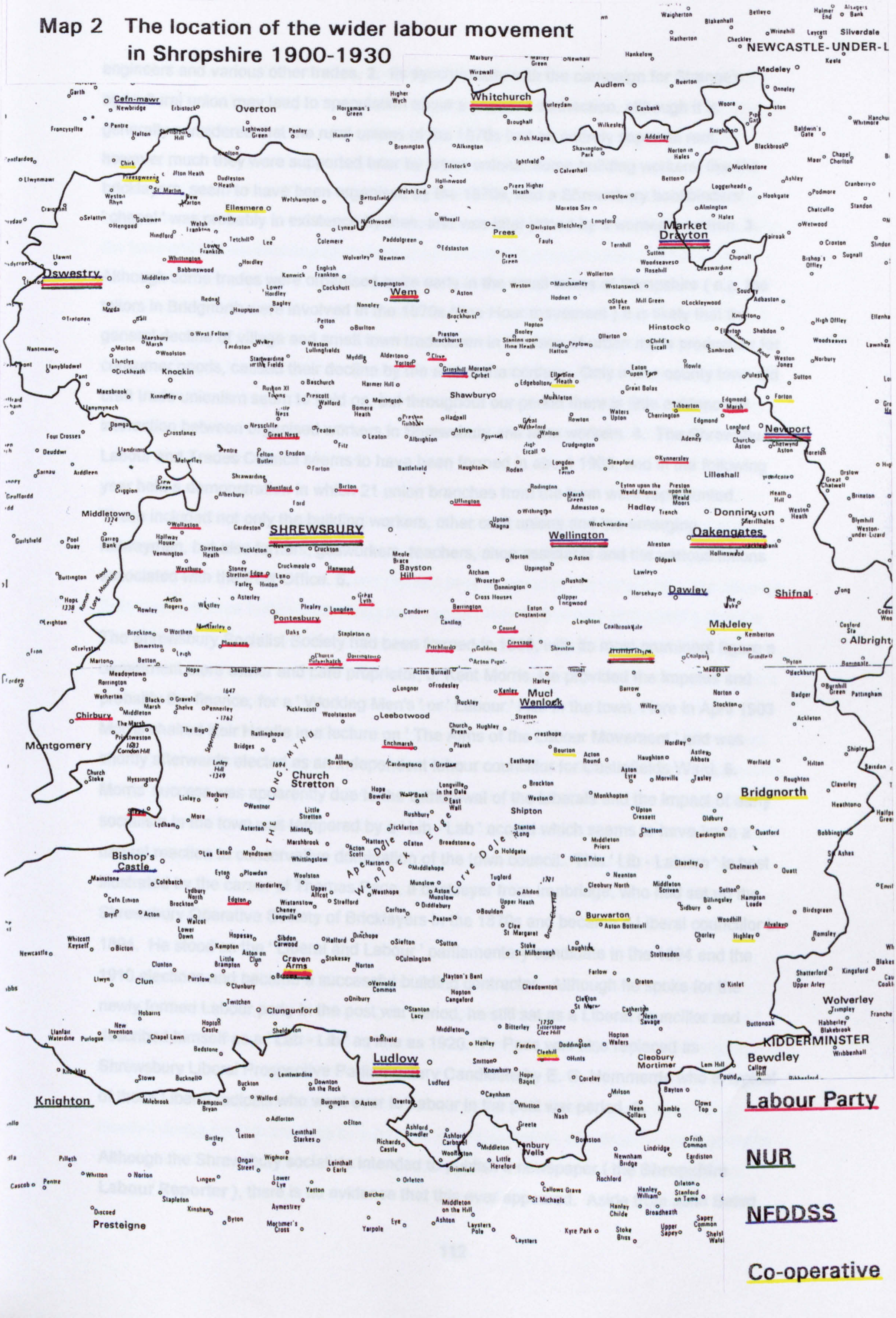
In this chapter the contribution of the other parts of the labour movement in Shropshire to agricultural trade unions will be examined. These will include craft and general trade unions in Shrewsbury and other towns of the county and their wider organisation into trade councils and socialist societies. Their evolution from ' Lib - Lab ' to Labour Party in the political sphere will also briefly be covered. The development of trade unionism in the eastern coalfield and other semi - industrial areas, where groups of extractive workers existed, will be outlined. The impact of organised railwaymen and other uniformed workers and the consumer co - operative movement, on agricultural trade unionism will be assessed. The largely forgotten radical ex - service movement of 1916 to 1920 will also be covered, especially in relation to the WU in Shropshire. The emergence of a rural Labour Party will be measured in the light of the ' rural radicalism ' postulated by Howkins. **1.**

Information gathered on branches and even reported meetings of the Labour Party, the NUR, the NFDDSS and the co - operative movement has been plotted on Map 2 and compared with the distribution of farmworkers' union branches on Map 1. It will be argued that aside from the positive influence of the NUR on the NUAW and the long term negative impact of the NFDDSS on the WU, the action of the wider working class movements was not a key explanatory factor in the growth and distribution of agricultural trades unionism in Shropshire.

Radicalism and socialism

Whilst Shropshire must seem one the most fruitless parts of the country for the labour movement, there is some evidence of craft trades unionism in Shrewsbury from the early nineteenth century. The town contained a brushmakers' ' house of call ' as early as 1829 and there are widespread reports from 1872 of the Nine Hour agitation in Shrewsbury involving

Map 2 The location of the wider labour movement in Shropshire 1900-1930



engineers and various other trades. **2.** Its synchronicity with the campaign for Strange's agricultural union may lead to speculation about a possible connection, although it is generally considered that the rural unions of the 1870s had an entirely separate root, however much they were supported later by urban unions. Some building workers, like the bricklayers, seem to have been organised by the 1870s, and a Shrewsbury bookbinders' ' chapel ' was probably in existence by then, and was later joined by a women's section. **3.**

Although some trades were organised quite early in the small towns of Shropshire (e.g. the tailors in Bridgnorth were involved in the 1870s Nine Hour movement) it is likely that the general decline of village and small town tradesmen in the face of urban mass production for consumer goods, caused their decline by the end of the century. Only in the county town did craft trade unionism seem to hold on, but throughout our period there is little evidence of interaction between organised workers in Shrewsbury and farm workers. **4.** The Shrewsbury Labour and Trades Council seems to have been formed in about 1903, and in the following year held a demonstration in which 21 union branches from the town were represented. These included not only the building workers, other craft unions and the emerging railwaymen, but also farriers, gasworkers, teachers, shop assistants and the various unions associated with the Post Office. **5.**

The Shrewsbury Socialist Society had been formed in 1899, with its most prominent figure a department store owner and cafe proprietor, J. Kent Morris. He provided the impetus and probably the finance, for a ' Working Men's ' or ' Labour ' Hall in the town. Here in April 1903 Morris chaired Keir Hardie in a lecture on ' The Aims of the Labour Movement ' and was shortly afterwards elected as an independent labour councillor for Castlefields Ward. **6.** Morris' success was apparently due to the withdrawal of the Liberals and the impact of early socialism in the town was tempered by a ' Lib - Lab ' accord which seems to have been a natural reaction to conservative domination of the town council. This ' Lib - Labism ' is best illustrated by the career of Thomas Pace, a bricklayer from Ironbridge, who had set up the Shrewsbury Operative Society of Bricklayers in the 1870s and became a Liberal councillor in 1894. He stood as the ' Liberal and Labour ' parliamentary candidate in the 1894 and the 1910 elections and became a successful building contractor. Although he spoke for the newly formed Labour party in the post war period, he still sat as a Liberal councillor and described himself as a ' Lab - Lib ' as late as 1920. **7.** Pace was also replaced as Shrewsbury Liberal Prospective Parliamentary Candidate by E. G. Hemmerde who is typical of those Liberal radicals who went over to Labour in the post war period. **8.**

Although the Shrewsbury socialists intended to publish a newspaper (the **Shropshire Labour Reporter**), there is no evidence that this ever appeared. Aside from John Beard

himself, there is no evidence of any socialist activity in the Shropshire countryside prior to the Great War. The embryonic movement had enough to do with pressing a socialist case on the prevalent Lib - Labism of the town trade unions, without conducting propaganda amongst farmworkers. Similarly, although there is some evidence of womens' suffrage activities in the towns of Shropshire, none has been traced in the countryside, nor has any connection been made between suffrage and socialism. Trade unionism continued to grow in the town and the socialist impact is evident with the first ' Labour Sunday ' by 1912 and its development into regular socialist celebrations like May Day. This was described by a sympathetic reporter in 1919 as a ' marvellous growth of organised labour, some thousands of men women and children taking part in a parade which eclipsed anything previously seen in Shrewsbury in the history of the Labour Movement '. Morris seems to have died before the First World War, though his hall continues to be the headquarters of the local Labour Party and other socialist pioneers like Frank Smout and E.B. Blake continued to be active in the Labour Party until the late 1920s. **9.**

The post war Shrewsbury trade union movement saw the creation of local branches of white collar unions like the National Union of Clerks, and also the development of a regular May Day celebration. Both the NUAW and the WU were involved in this (see p.98), but although their speakers were featured (Fielding was a particularly enthusiastic participant), there is little evidence that rank and file farmworkers themselves took part. It seems likely that these events had little impact on agricultural trade unionism. The borough Labour Party did have a brief electoral flourish with a clutch of town councillors, but its impact tailed off at the end of our period and it took the growth of light industry in the town in the 1930s to provide a solid working class constituency for the party. The **Shrewsbury Chronicle** was virulent, especially during its fascist supporting period, in its criticism of the local Labour Party. Although the Chronicle was keen to label it as left wing (particularly sneering at the I.L.P. element), the Shrewsbury party may have played up to this role by inviting speakers like Tom Mann and slating the ' reactionary government policy in relation to the new democracies and the socialist republics.' **10.**

Socialists in some parts of Britain were active in union propaganda in the countryside, Howkins for example, has found strong links in Norfolk. Some of this work was connected with the Clarion movement started by Robert Blatchford, who encouraged idealistic groups of cyclists to emerge from the towns to spread a socialist message to poor benighted farmworkers : ' Many quiet nooks in the Midlands and the North of England have been invaded during the last few days by a band of cycling socialists who describe themselves as the ' Clarion Club '. They have been endeavouring, with scant measure of success, to

propagate their views in the country districts and to advertise the socialist organ after which their club is named.'

Curiously, Shrewsbury was the venue for five of the Clarion's movement's annual Easter meetings within our period, no doubt because of its central location and good north - south rail links. Although several thousand Clarion cyclists enjoyed the picturesque scenery of the county, there is no evidence of any interaction with Shropshire farmworkers. The **Shropshire Chronicle** genteelly ignored nearly all these activities which had included the unveiling of one of the famous Clarion vans in 1914 (see Photograph 12). Although ' Shrewsbury's only socialist councillor gave a conducted tour ' in 1928, these incomers seem to have contributed little to the local movement. **11.**

Industrial workers

The oldest part of the labour movement had developed in the eastern Shropshire coalfield, particularly the Ironbridge Gorge. This area was an important and early pioneer in the development of British industry, based mainly on its technical expertise in successfully using coal to smelt iron. In the chaotic industrialisation of the early nineteenth century, ' combinations ' of skilled ironworkers and miners took part in ' quasi - insurrectionary ' movements which combined political radicalism with primitive trades unionism. Such outbreaks in 1820 - 21, 1822, 1831 and 1842 were regarded as anathema by the Shropshire gentry and farmers, whose military force - the county Yeomanry - willingly took part in their repression. There is also evidence that farmworkers shared this antipathy towards these industrial workers as a race apart (see pp.170 and 196). This may relate to the fact that, although the majority of migrants to the east Shropshire coalfield came from the rural part of the county, the highly paid specialist workers, who were most involved in the early combinations, tended to be more peripatetic and were recruited from Staffordshire or South Wales. **12.**

Although the combined miners and Chartists' strike of 1842 made ' the citizens of Shrewsbury live in fear of an armed attack by the colliers ', the county establishment easily contained the outbreak. Trade unionism here never achieved long term stability and permanent organisation and by 1845, Shropshire wages were 20% below those in iron works in northern England. Although the area diversified into clay industries and coal mining, it never maintained its early position and the last three decades of the century were a time of precipitate decline. By 1885, iron production was one quarter of that of 1869 and had been higher in 1800. **13.** With ' no industrial labouring employment available, the agricultural surplus could not be absorbed by local industry ' and by the end of the century ' Salopians

went to the South Wales coalfield '. Although the employers conceded the Nine Hour Day in 1872, this does not seem to have been the result of any local trade union pressure, and the causal relationship between agricultural trade unionism and miners' association in Worcestershire and South Staffordshire, described by Wanklyn, has no parallel in the Shropshire Black Country. **14.**

Not until the last decade of the nineteenth century as the iron trade at last stabilised is there evidence of long term organisation in the coalfield, though even then Gregory concludes : ' Trades unionism was not strong in Shropshire '. Although the Blast Furnacemen's Association was established by 1892, it could not prevent a 5% wage cut the following year. Similarly, Oakengate miners in 1890 were successful as a ' strike was called to support their demands for a 10% rise ', but could not prevent a reduction throughout the coalfield in 1893. The sources and history of the later trade unionism in the eastern coalfield is curiously opaque. Even the Shropshire Miners' Association, which conducted strikes in 1912 and 1924, attracted few reports in the local press. **15.**

The development of the Workers' Union in the unskilled iron trades can be viewed as part of this 1890s trade union growth. Despite the WU's establishment in a number of strong branches in the eastern coalfield of Shropshire, (see pp.38 - 41) this was little more than an offshoot of its stronger cousin in the Black Country. Just as the WU leadership was willing to abandon its agricultural membership when it could not afford to service it, the same option was available to the WU national leadership with regard to expensive industrial branches in the Ironbridge area. In the post war period the WU continued to be active in the eastern coalfield amongst iron and steel trades representing labourers in partnership with the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, which represented skilled workers. However, these and other unions failed to establish a labour culture which would give the long term organisational stability and electoral advantage which was becoming common in most other industrial areas of the country. **16.** Even in the post war heyday of trade union growth it failed to achieve a Labour Party victory in the Wrekin bye - elections.

The ' lukewarm support for Labour at Ironbridge ' reported in the 1922 election sums up its paucity of impact. The lack of influence of the eastern coalfield unions in its rural hinterland is illustrated by a twelve week lockout of tileworkers by members of the WU at the Dunhill ceramics works at Coalport in 1923. Here financial support was provided by nearby branches of farmworkers. This inversion of the traditional support of urban workers for their less fortunate rural comrades demonstrates the lack of connection between the wider labour movement in the eastern coalfield and agricultural trade unionism in the county. **17.**

There were other industrial areas of the county where one might have expected the labour movement to have made an impact. Athough the lead mining area around the Stiperstones had suffered terminal decline before 1900, the nearby Hanwood area still had coalmines into the 1920s. Here miners, represented by the Shropshire Miners' Association were defeated in a strike in 1924, and although branches of the NUAW and more particularly the WU existed in nearby villages (for example Hookagate), there is no direct evidence to link the two union traditions. **18.**

The Clee Hills, with a number of quarrying industries, also had coal mines on a small scale from the 1860s. Here the miners' individuality was often reinforced by smallholdings (see pp.152 -153). Even though the Labour Party's decision to contest the disastrous Ludlow bye -election of 1923 was influenced by the threat of : ' serious trouble among the miners and railwaymen in the Division, if the seat was not fought on this occasion ', no evidence of miners' union organisation has been found. A weak branch of the Quarrymen's Union existed in the post war period, but this could do little to influence wage negotiations, and was powerless in the teeth of two large aristocratic owners to improve housing which the Medical Officer of Health described as ' some of the most disgraceful he had ever come across.' Organised labour made so little impact here that a modern local historian claimed there was ' no national or local sickness arrangement and no trades union .' Indeed a photograph he reproduced of the Barn Pit during the General Strike is almost certainly of strike breakers.**19.**

The total lack of NUAW branches in the whole south - east of Shropshire mirrors this weakness of trades unionism in the Clee Hills area. The exceptions were the active NUR branch at Ludlow which influenced the surrounding NUAW branches (See pp. 51 and 120), and the Severnside industrial village of Highley. Looking towards the South Staffordshire coalfield, Highley was more a ' traditional ' mining community in miniature with its own co - operative, Methodist and militant labour tradition. (See p.124) The group of strong NUAW branches along the Severn north of Highley (See p.71) may owe something to links with this labour stronghold, although an alternative explanation may be in the good communication links along the river valley. **20.**

The last area of the county where a labour movement took root was around Oswestry. Here a well established quarrying industry was joined in the late Victorian period by coal mines, (which were an offshoot of the Wrexham and Chirk coalfields) and by an important junction of the Cambrian Railway, with the company engineering works. An influx of mainly Welsh workers probably contributed to a more militant attitude and perhaps influenced the development of other trades unionism in the town of Oswestry itself, among building operatives, shop workers and clerks. Socialism existed in local politics with a Mr Highett of

Oswestry chairing a meeting for Keir Hardie as early as 1903. Local strength is illustrated when ' the Oswestry Labour Party rejected the proposal of the local Liberal Association to run a joint Parliamentary candidate ' in 1919, and when Evan Evans, a railway mechanic, became Labour mayor of the town in 1928. The Oswestry branch of the NUR was particularly strong with nearly 1,000 members in 1920 and had to be persuaded by the intervention of General Secretary J. H. Thomas to call off a proposed wartime strike. However, its influence on the surrounding farmworkers was minimal, in contrast to the NUR elsewhere in the county, since the Oswestry branch of the NUAW had only 16 members in 1920. **21.**

The North Wales Miners' Assocation (NWMA) in the shape of Tom Morris, had more impact on farmworkers. Morris gave a creditable performance as Labour Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Oswestry as early as the ' khaki' election, (immediately after the formation of the local party) and stood again in 1922 and 1924. He was elected as the first Labour Shropshire county councillor for the Whittington seat in 1919 and continued to advocate a rural radicalism, supported by a strong branch of the NUAW in the village. As a whole, though, the NWMA to judge from its records, had little interest in farmworkers in their area, although they considered Morris was ' our candidate .. at Oswestry '. **22.**

The rural Labour Party

Evidence of Labour Party activity in the rural areas of Shropshire in the post war period is very sketchy. Nationally the Labour Party saw rural districts as a problem which would have to be solved if it were to achieve an overall majority. This view was promoted not only by more urban party idealists, but also by surprisingly experienced organisers like William Holmes of the NUAW : ' We shall never get a good working majority until we get 50 or 60 constituencies in the countryside returning Labour members.' The Ludlow bye - election of 1923 seemed to offer such a chance : ' what better oppportunity would we have both to rivet public attention on the injustices of the agricultural labourers and to win the landworkers to the cause of Socialism and Labour '. According to the Labour shadow minister Marion Phillips : ' Nor should we forget that it is vain to hope that Labour can ever secure a clear majority in the House of Commons until it wins a large number of these backward rural districts . . . Through these dreaming Shropshire villages lies our road to power.' This view was prevalent amongst both the I.L.P. and ex- Liberals who brought with them the ideological baggage of land reform. **23.**

However, the Ludlow debacle was predicted by some farmworkers' organisers like Joseph Duncan of the Scottish Farm Servants Union : ' If the Labour Party wants an agricultural policy, it will have to shed the illusion that agriculture and arcady are synonymous.' John

Beard of the WU also consistently argued in the pages of **The Record**, for a more realistic rural policy which would not alienate the land worker from his surroundings. In particular, he opposed the ongoing policy of land nationalisation at the Labour Party Conference : ' They had heard a good deal about the necessity for the political Labour party to win the rural constituencies of England, but if they passed this Amendment it would be quite impossible to do.' **24.**

The disaster at Ludlow could not quench the enthusiasm of at least the I.L.P. to establish a rural toe-hold : ' We have sufficient names of keen brave men to form at least two branches of the I.L.P. Many were deeply impressed with our message who could not quite shake off their old traditions in ten days. The victims of feudalism will talk for many years of the message of hope. Two years' organisation, a good crowd and even Ludlow can be rescued from the clutches of English conservative influence.' **25.**

Significantly, the tiny organisation left behind by the socialist incomers was centred on the railwaymen of Craven Arms. However, it was the ongoing task of maintaining the farmworkers' organisation which was to be the only tangible and realistic result. This was recognised by Harry Drinkwater, the official responsible for the Ludlow organisation, who pointed out : ' the depression that had begun to be felt by countryside Labour committees following upon the disasters that were overtaking the industrial organisation of the farmworker ' **26.** As we have seen (p.101 - 102) there developed in a few districts of Shropshire, a ' rural radical ' culture similar to that identified by Howkins in Norfolk. This was based on a purely local Labour Party, devoted to issues like housing, which had a specific working class appeal and constituency of NUAW members and their families. In market towns near to railway lines and particularly in the south - west of the county, this process was aided by the NUR, but in other areas it was entirely the work of the farmworkers themselves.

The WU, with its lack of village activists, was not involved in creating the Shropshire Labour party, except in one or two villages like Ellerdine and probably Chirbury in the far west. In the face of anti - socialist propaganda, middle class rural Labour sympathisers were also very thin on the ground. Although the Labour party's rural campaigns of 1926 and 1927 did make some impact, their chosen location and success was almost entirely due to the NUAW. Away from the railways, it can be concluded that the NUAW **was** the rural labour movement.

The vision was still there to inspire the rural activist : ' When the time comes when the agricultural worker in country villages can take his part in the Labour movement without fear of consequences, there will be a bigger victory won than was ever won in Flanders or at Waterloo ', but the reality was the solid effort needed to keep even a modest union structure

intact. Howkins points out that prior to the Great War ' the majority of working class voters simply could not vote Labour . . . even if they wanted to ', but after 1918, with a few exceptions Labour did contest all the Shropshire parliamentary seats. With the exception of the Wrekin in 1929, working class people, including many farmworkers, deliberately chose not to vote Labour. **27.**

Railwaymen

The NUAW and the WU were not the only unions in the countryside recruiting the rural poor. Members of the uniformed working class were often the only union members for miles. Postmen, who were often members of the Postmen's Federation and above all railwaymen, invariably came from the same class as agricultural workers. Raymond Williams wrote eloquently of his upbringing at Pandy, where his father was a signalman, on the Herefordshire / Monmouthshire border, further down the line from Craven Arms :

> These men at that country station were industrial workers, trade unionists, in a small group within a primarily rural and agricultural economy. All of them like my father, still had close connections with that agricultural life. One ran a smallholding in addition to his job on the railway. Most of them had relatives in farm work. All of them had gardens and pigs or bees or ponies which were an important part of their work and income. **28.**

The National Union of Railwaymen, (only formed itself from weaker components in 1913) had an important effect upon and a strong relationship with, the NUAW. Railwaymen often had a sense of industrial unity, feeling part of a large and powerful union which the railway lines themselves helped to transmit through the coutryside. Williams comments :

> At the same time, by the very fact of the railway, with the trains passing through, from the cities, from the factories, from the ports, from the collieries, and by the fact of the telephone and the telegraph, which was especially important for the signalmen, who through it had a community with other signalmen over a wide social network, talking beyond their work with men they might never actually meet but whom they knew very well through voice and opinion and story, they were part of a modern industrial class. **29.**

The railwaymen had often suffered from the similar intimidation to farmworkers when trying to organise. During a 50 year service presentation to William Cadwallader by the NUR

President at Craven Arms in 1927 he was referred to as an ' old friend of the branch and a pioneer of its early days, when it was something of a crime to belong to a trades union.' Various authors have described the way in which railwaymen, being independent of local farmers, acted as local officials of the NUAW. F. E. Green, writing at the height of the post war growth, referred to : ' the shunter, the signalman, the platelayer, the porter of wayside country stations have been the pioneers in these country districts, reaching out their hands to farmworkers, and giving their help as secretaries and chairmen '. S. J. Gee, a Norfolk Labour party agent, considered that : ' Proximity to a railway will often mean that useful and valuable leaders can be found amongst members of the railway unions. ' The only NUR member located in Shropshire who acted as a NUAW branch secretary was Tom Hardwick of Ludlow, as well as Mr Roberts of Gnosall, just over the border in Staffordshire. In the absence of a closed shop, they also shared the farmworkers' difficulty in recruiting and retaining members in remote locations. During the 1926 General Strike, union official J. Wollam told an NUR meeting at Wellington that : ' it was much more difficult for a man to be out in an isolated place than Wolverhampton or Stafford where there was a number of men out together '. **30.**

In Shropshire the growth of the NUR mirrored that of the NUAW and WU to an extraordinary extent, with the addition of variations perhaps attributable to national strikes in 1921 and 1926. From small beginnings, with five branches in 1909, by the last year of the war there were 11 branches, with over 3,500 members. Although nearly half of these were in the county town (an important junction for north / south and east / west routes), Oswestry, with its through routes and industrial hinterland had nearly a thousand members. All the market towns of Shropshire had branches and in Oswestry, perhaps in the eastern coalfield, and in the south of the county, centring on Ludlow and Craven Arms, a railwaymens' culture appeared. Working class culture, if transmitted in the way suggested by Williams, had potential origins in several industrial locations at the termini of railways that passed through Shropshire ; South Wales, North Wales, Manchester, Liverpool and the Birmingham conurbation. **31.**

In the towns of Shropshire this culture took the form of support for the Shrewsbury Trades Council, where the two NUR branches were dominant and an annual railwaymen's church parade. The organising secretary of the Shrewsbury Divisional Labour Party, S. M. Davies, was also assistant secretary of the NUR No. 1 branch, and long serving councillor Lewis Jackson was a railway signalman. Another town councillor, R. W. Tipton, was a railway blacksmith who ' does not pretend to be anything other than an honest socialist '. There was an active NUR Women's Guild whose secretary, Mrs. E. Allen, was the treasurer of the

Labour Party, and who became the first Shrewsbury woman town councillor. The Shrewsbury Guild hosted the Women's Guild national conference in 1928, complete with a ' Miss Railway ' beauty competition! Craven Arms also displayed this culture in miniature, centred on the Railwaymen's Hut. **32.**

The NUR's support for the NUAW was not entirely altruistic. This was evident in Lancashire before the war when Mutch found in Ormskirk that the NUR branch was ' very enthusiastic in support of the labourer during his first fight for economic freedom ', and ' much of this enthusiasm stemmed from the fact that they had first hand experience of the farmworker's conditions.' To a large extent, the NUR followed the WU's view that by helping raise farmworkers' wages, their own would be less threatened by undercutting from the unorganised. Seconding a WU resolution at the 1925 TUC, C. T. Cramp of the NUR claimed :

> Every time he had to plead on behalf of the railwaymen before any tribunal, he had the wages and conditions of the agricultural labourers cited against him . . . They had been told that these people provided the recruiting ground for the railway services and their wages compared very favourably with those of railwaymen. There is no opportunity of organising them in the normal way, that is to say, of holding meetings and of getting them together, as happens in the towns. We feel, so long as we have this mass of underpaid labour in the countryside, it constitutes a menace to the well being of each and every one of us .

Cramp was supported by A. Seaton of the Postal Workers : ' We in the Post Office are very often told that the wages of the rural postmen could be quite properly reduced to the level of the wages paid to the agricultural worker.' At a mass meeting at Shifnal in 1923, E. Browning of the NUR ' urged the landworkers to follow the example set them by railworkers to organise, educate and agitate '. **33.** During the ' khaki ' election of 1918, according to Robert Kilvert, the NFU activist, the NUR's self interest was paramount :

> They had heard a great deal about the farm labourers' vote and they were told that the farm labourer was going to vote against the farmer. It was a great mistake, and that they should put it to the labourer that his interests were the same as the farmer's. The farm labourers were not going back to their former position and the farmers did not want them to do so. He had talked to a farm labourer on the question and he had learned from him that the farm labourers had been organised by the railwaymen, he told the labourer that the railwaymen would drop them when they had served their purposes. **34.**

Despite Kilvert's cynicism, the NUR took its responsibilities seriously. In January 1921 the NUR's industrial secretary distributed a letter to its branches, which contained the following policy ; ' for some time I have been receiving complaints from the Agricultural Labourers' Union with reference to railwaymen working on the land after finishing their railway duties. This conduct is having a very detrimental effect on men who get their living in those occupations.' **35.**

Relationships between the NUR and NUAW in Shropshire were generally fraternal in contrast to the tension which characterised those between the NUAW and WU. As early as December 1916, the NUAW EC approved ' a system of transfer of members between the NUR and ourselves . . . such members would become entitled to immediate benefits in so far as legal assistance and protection benefit.' **36.** By the following autumn, the first of ' several joint meetings held in Shropshire and Cheshire ' took place at Ludlow, with James Lunnon, Tom Hardwick, Robert Moffat (an NUR official from Birmingham) and R. Price, Honorary Secretary of the recently formed ' Local Association for Wounded and Disabled Sailors and Soldiers ' (sic). Largely because of Hardwick's influence, this became a yearly event of some importance. Lunnon, for example, returned in 1920 to announce the union's push for a £3 minimum wage (see p.51). Again, the senior NUR organiser from Birmingham spoke, with the vote of thanks moved by G. Randle, local NUR Secretary and seconded by J. W. Haydock, a postman. The latter had become, the previous year, the first Labour town councillor in Ludlow on a socialist and ex - service ticket. (Haydock was joined later by William Channin, a railway telegraphist and another ex - service postman, Tom Jones, had topped the poll in the municipal elections at the nearby ancient borough of Bishop's Castle.) **37.**

The annual demonstration of the NUR and NUAW held at Craven Arms from 1919 was another important manifestation of common interest (see p.100). Listeners at the fifth event in 1923 heard ' rousing and inspiring addresses on the need for unity amongst all sections of wage workers ' with radical political messages ; ' the day has arrived when the wage earning class would undoubtedly be powerful enough to be able to take office and control their own destiny, politically as well as, sooner or later, taking complete control of industry.' **38.** Despite setbacks of their own, the industrial strength of the NUR meant that their rural members were in a less fragile position than the NUAW. Thus, in October 1919, the NUR won a national strike, despite government mobilisation on a scale which foreshadowed 1926. In Shrewsbury, 1,000 members were out, the Shropshire Dragoons were formed from the staff of the local Territorial Army and the government tried to recruit The Comrades of the

Great War as strikebreakers. F. E.Green used some fine rhetoric to describe the support given to the rail strike by farmworkers :

> Now came the test as to whether that link which had been forged in the fiery furnace of war between the industrial and the rural workers would stand the strain of a great railway strike. Hitherto, the temptation to leave ill - paid work on the land for the railway had been irresistible. The railway porter's minimum was 51s. ; the farm worker's average minimum was 37s. 6d.
> But the farm worker and the railway porter, the plate layer and the signalman, even in the most remote country districts, had now become comrades in the new trade union and political movement; and many of them had seen a vision of a new earth as they stood close to one another in the ordeal of battle. The link, as of truest steel, held.
> To most, not excluding those who had been watching the growing solidarity of labour, the loyalty of the farm workers to the men on the line came as a surprise. They were firmer in their determination to stand by the railway men even than the industrial workers, and this, I think, can be traced to their minds being uninfluenced by the daily press to the same extent as townsmen. They learn not from the printed page, but from Nature and their nearest neighbours.

At exactly the same time as the NUR success, on the Staffordshire side of the border, hundreds of NUAW members were locked out around Grosnall (see p.50). Even the backing of the railwaymen could not retrieve some of these impossible disputes in which the NUAW found itself. Despite joint NUR / NUAW mass meetings at Newport and Stafford, and distress collections for the farmworkers, this dispute ended in defeat and bitterness. **39.**

The NUR, therefore, was the most important adjunct to agricultural trades unionism, but even with its industry wide might, it could not always achieve success for its allies, particularly away from the railway lines. Curiously - and this may perhaps be explained by personal or national loyalties - the NUR does not seem to have had any relationship with the WU in Shropshire. This was in contrast to nearby Montgomeryshire, where Pretty claims the WU was dominant among farmworkers and joint meetings were held with the NUR, as at Caerws, addressed by W. H. Edwards in October 1920. **40.**

Co - operatives

The ' third arm ' of the labour movement, co - operatives, were not a strong presence in the Shropshire countryside in our period. There were around fourteen co - operative societies in

the county, some of which, like Shrewsbury, also had branches at some distance - in Ludlow, Clee Hill and Craven Arms. The two latter were (in 1938) reasonably successful, with sales figures of £7,838 and £7,602 respectively - with a substantial spend per head of the population. Although some farmworkers were probably members, miners, quarrymen and railwaymen gave them their strength. **41.** The Shrewsbury Society was very successful in the town, with nearly 7,000 members by 1925, and new premises opened in 1923. Various people made their labour movement careers through the Shrewsbury co - operative movement, like William Frederick Hunt, district foreman of Wagon Repairs Ltd, who as the oldest member of the Shropshire Co - operative committee performed the opening ceremony at the new premises in Castle Foregate. Active amongst the younger generation was A. H. Jones, a carpenter and a conscientious objector during the war. He was President of the society by 1916 and proposed a solution to the Shrewsbury slum problem with co - operative labour in 1926. He was also active in the Musical Masqueraders concert party, which appeared widely throughout the county at labour movement events. **42.** Periodic attempts were made by the Shrewsbury society to set up rural branches, usually in places which had some industry such as Pontesbury and Minsterley, but these seem not to have been very successful. **43.**

The eastern coalfield had strong local co - operative societies at Ironbridge and Oakengates, with offshoot branches at Madeley and Newport, and the Oswestry Society (founded as early as 1878) had 1,500 members in 1924. Also in the north west, the mining village of St. Martins had its own society, which spread across the border into Wales, and ran its own sports day : ' We had a tea party, to which we all had to take our own cups and spoons, with sandwiches, slab cake, fruit, plain and seed cake, and jellies made in large enamel bowls. Afterwards we marched behind the Ifton Band to a field for the sports. Then the band played on for dancing on the field. It really was a great day.'

Other market towns in north Shropshire, which certainly had union branches, had societies which may have had farmworkers as members. Some societies, such as Ellesmere and Press, were small, although the latter village society attempted to promote co - operative principles in a lecture series in 1922, whilst Whitchurch had over a thousand members in the 1920s. On the lower Severn the market town of Bridgnorth and Highley, the mining village, also had active societies :

> The most important shop at Highley since 1912 has been the Co - op - always known as the "Co". . . . Quarter ending at the Co was quite a ritual - members were allowed a quarter's credit, but accounts had to be settled at the end of each quarter, before you could start running up the bills again. So after stock - taking

was done, accounts were paid and the ' divi ' handed out, one would see a long queue of customers outside the shop waiting to start all over again!
The ' Co ' , run by a local committee, also involved itself in the social life of the village, by organising charabanc trips, sports days and children's parties. At the time of the 13 week - long miner's strike in 1921, the Co gave out vouchers to the miners' families. **44.**

Three rural co - operative societies have been traced in Shropshire. Bourton, near Much Wenlock, had a grocery co - operative store which was affiliated to the Co-operative Union as early as 1869, and lasted until 1924. A classic ' closed ' village on Lord Wenlock's estate, Bourton, and its immediate neighbouring villages, do not seem to have had union branches, although nearby Brockton had an NUAW branch from 1920 and the Much Wenlock branch was fairly active. The Bourton co - op is likely to have been another example of the tenacity of Shropshire gentry paternalism - like Sir Baldwin Leighton with Strange's union, or his grandson, Major Leighton, with the Comrades of the Great War. This suggestion is confirmed by the existence of another co - operative store founded by Lord Wenlock on his Yorkshire estate at Escrick in 1872. **45.**

The village society at Burwarton, a few miles south, on the east side of Clee Hills, coincides with the segment of south east Shropshire where little evidence of agricultural unionism has been found. The village was dominated by Viscount Boyne, living at Burwarton Hall. William Boddey, secretary of the co - op society for over 30 years, is described as gardener and forester to the Viscount. This indicates it was another example of a paternalistic co - operative society and may have been connected with the Burwarton Poultry Society which seems to have marketed cottagers' eggs. The Clee Liberty area in the higher parts of the parish was inhabited by miners and quarrymen and although some of these may have been unionised, neither WU nor NUAW members seem to have been active in the village. **46.**

The only village co - operative society in which there was definite farmworkers' union activity was at Tibberton, west of Newport. The society here had been founded in 1876, and although it never had more than fifty members it was clearly important in a village population of around 150 inhabitants. Tibberton was one of the few villages where the NUAW and WU (see p.71) had rival branches, the latter as early as the 1899 campaign, but the NUAW supplanted it with a strong branch by 1920. Tibberton was fairly close to Ellerdine Heath, home to John Beard, and an area of smallholders and Methodist chapels, and the co - operative society probably resulted from this self help ethos. Beard and his associates, both in Methodism and the insurance business, were active in promoting the North Shropshire Smallholders Co - operative Insurance Society under the slogan ' Cottagers insure your pigs

and get your feeding supplies.' Its secretary was Beard's friend, Tom Griffiths, who lived in nearby Edgmond, and was dubbed ' the first working man magistrate in Shropshire '. **47.**

Another anomaly was the village of Roden, near Wellington, dominated from 1914, by a Co - operative Wholesale Society fruit farm, with a processing plant. Although strongly unionised from 1922, it did not prevent a long running dispute with the management which ended with the union head office talking to the CWS in Manchester, before terms of settlement were approved and endorsed. Here a paternalistic co - operative culture seems to have been encouraged with a convalescent home and maypole dancing. **48.**

By and large, though, it can be concluded that the consumer co - operative movement in Shropshire, whilst reasonably strong, seems to have had little impact on the development of farmworkers' unions. The strength of co - operation in Shropshire lay in the county and other market towns. Although in the eastern coalfield co - operation was probably relatively stronger in the working class culture than trade unionism, in none of its locations did it expand successfully into the surrounding rural areas. The few village co-operative societies were probably due to a more modern form of gentry paternalism. The possible exceptions are Tibberton, which may relate to the producer co - operative of the Ellerdine Heath area, (and perhaps Beard's personal interest) and Roden, where the head office of the CWS imposed a co - operative culture. Interestingly in none of the areas of ' rural radicalism ' where the NUAW developed its political support (e.g. in the ' sandstone villages ') did this extend to setting up new co - operative societies or even inviting the Shrewsbury society into establishing a presence. This confirms that this ' rural radicalism ' was self generating, without support from nearby towns.

Ex - Servicemen

Whilst the NUAW monopolised relations with the NUR in the county, the WU through the efforts of its organiser, W. H. Edwards, attempted to do the same with ex - service organisations. This may be linked with the more jingoistic attitude of the WU during the war, and their willingness to serve on military tribunals etc., or Edwards' personal interest, having been in the B.E.F. between 1915 and 1917. Ex - service organisations appeared during the middle of the war, in response to the ' comb out ' policy of the military authorities, which threatened to force discharged soldiers back into uniform. Their history is yet to be fully explored and given the lack of surviving sources, remains confused. It may even be questioned whether they should be considered **part** of the wider labour movement.

The National Association of Discharged and Demobilised Soldiers and Sailors was formed in 1916, and linked to the labour movement. Not to be outdone, a group of Conservative M.P.s gave support to The Comrades of the Great War, and in April 1917 a Liberal M. P. started the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Soldiers and Sailors. However, the latter organisation soon developed a left wing programme, including the ' colonial ' rate of pay for troops of six shillings a day, full employment, in the absence of which, unemployed benefit of £2 a week, and the nationalisation of land and the means of production. Radical ex - service organisations were hostile to the wealthier Comrades of the Great War; and refused to accept officers for membership unless they had risen from the ranks. With similar aims, in many places the Association and the Federation coalesced, and the two titles were used indiscriminately in newspaper reports, adding to the difficulty of clear identification. The addition of a weak Soldiers' and Sailors' Union sponsored by the Daily Herald, and an I.L.P. dominated National Union of Ex - Servicemen, gave rise to central government concern about subversion. **49.**

The Federation became the embodiment of the view that something positive must come out of the war to justify the ' blood sacrifice ' of the working class for their country. The view is summarised in a resolution proposed by the Shawbury branch of the NUAW to a general council meeting in March 1918 : ' That we place on record our determination by all means in our power to destroy the militarism of Germany . . . and all that the democracy of this country has been fighting for shall not be in vain'. **50.** Many Shropshire farmworkers had served in the forces : ' Thousands from Shropshire, Herefordshire and the bordering Welsh counties flocked to the Regimental Depot in Shrewsbury '. **51.** Many were traumatised by their war service. Sergeant Tudor Evans of Cleobury Mortimer had enlisted aged eighteen :

> After the war . . . I tried to mix with my pre - war friends, tried to find pleasure in their games and pursuits, but try as I would I could not mix. I always felt the odd man out, to me their pleasure seemed childish and empty . . .And for some years, I lived crushed between two generations, unable to join either . . . Old wounds broke out and refused to heal. Winter fogs knocked me over and left me with serious lung trouble - that damned gas.

The official view was very different ; ' Generally speaking the farm labourers are returning from the war and settling down to work in a very satisfactory manner '. **52.** For some men like Evans, it seemed natural to associate with those who had shared the same appalling experiences. Army service meant that men from Shropshire mixed with others with more of an industrial labour tradition : ' The younger men through the the ordeal of battle had learnt much from the mill hand and miner '. Whilst in training, as early as November 1914, the 7th

King's Shropshire Light Infantry (which included many farmworkers), was brigaded with the 10th Welsh Regiment, the ' Rhondda Pals ', many of whose miners had been involved in the Tonypandy strikes. Both battalions mutinied against their accommodation in tents : ' Mass meetings were held and cases of men refusing to go on parade by companies occurred '. Those called up from 1916 intimately interacted with men from other social classes, in a way which would have been unthinkable before the war. A ' gentleman - ranker ' described his service in the KSLI : ' They are not a very enthusiastic class of men that are coming up, and most of them would give any amount to get their ticket . . .There are a very fine lot of yokels here from all parts of Shropshire. There are in my tent four farm labourers, and a gypsy who cannot read and write.' **53.**

Whilst the initial objective of the radical ex - service organisations was to resist the ' comb out ' of those who had already ' done their bit ', by the 1918 election, convinced that ' the working class had won the war ', they saw their role as achieving something tangible for their members' self sacrifice. A surviving banner image of the Federation proclaims this as ' We Fought and Bled That Thou Might'st Live.' Briefly, they were actively opposed to the ex - officer dominated Comrades, who in turn saw them as dangerous subversives : ' It was the desire of a few ' hot air ' individuals to scatter unrest and dissatisfaction amongst demobilised men '. **54.**

There was also a widespread belief that farmers and their families had done well financially out of the war, had avoided volunteering for military service and after conscription was introduced, had claimed reserve occupation status. There is tangible Shropshire evidence for the avoidance of military service by farmers' relatives, as records show nearly all ' pivotal ' men for whom exemption could be claimed, shared the same surname as their employer. The view that shirking farmers were ungrateful was expressed by A. E. Monks, the NUAW Staffordshire organiser in the 1919 strikes : ' some of them men had faced hell in France and Mesopotamia, for the benefit of those who would crush them '. **55.**

The Federation first appeared in Shropshire in the autumn of 1917, with branches in Ludlow and Shrewsbury, which passed founding resolutions against the re - call of ex - servicemen , and demanded the repeal of the Review of Exemption Act. There was an immediate connection with the labour movement. In Ludlow, a joint meeting was held with the NUAW and the NUR, and the Shrewsbury branch held its meetings in the Labour Hall. **56.**

Despite the involvement of the NUAW, in Shropshire at least, the WU attempted to make the ex - servicemen's cause their own. Encouraged perhaps by ' uncompromising right wing ' leadership, at least 5,000 members nationally were said to have volunteered by December

1914. **57.** On his return from France, W.H.Edwards became elected President of the Shrewsbury Federation, which already claimed 270 members. By its first AGM in September 1918, this had grown to 400, with links to branches in Wellington, Oswestry, Whitchurch, and later Newport. Edwards strengthened the link with the labour movement. Alderman A. Taylor, the Labour Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Shrewsbury, in the ' khaki ' election, addressing a Federation meeting ' advocated the claims of disabled soldiers to adequate pensions ', and declared that : ' Those lads who had come back from the war had not been found that work which they required '.

Elsewhere in the county, the Federation secretary in Oswestry, F.L.Moxey, spoke at an election meeting at Market Drayton for Tom Morris, the Labour candidate. **58.** The turn of the year also saw the appearance of the Comrades of the Great War in Shropshire, whose view was that ' party politics would have nothing to do with the movement.' Some Federation members already shared this outlook ; a Mr. Wakefield of the Oswestry group spoke at a joint meeting with the Comrades to welcome war hero Captain Trowse, and even Roy Littlewood, secretary of the Shrewsbury Federation, felt that it was ' unfortunate that there were four different soldiers' associations. . . because he was sorry to see discharged soldiers exploited by political associations.' **59.** Nonetheless, Edwards tried to maintain links with the Labour movement. Both he and a Mr.Taylor representing the Federation spoke at the 1919 May Day demonstration in Shrewsbury. A week later Edwards gave a succinct restatement of his own position : ' They contended that the men who had ' done their bit ', were entitled to preference in relation to employment, and that they sould be paid the trade union rate of wages for the district. It was important that they should secure representation on public bodies. They went out to fight Prussian autocracy and now they must get rid of Prussianism in their own country.'

The meeting however, also supported a resolution ' approving the action of the committee in protesting against a display of the ILP banner at the recent labour demonstration in Shrewsbury.' Despite, as Englander points out, ' the differing action of the ILP members during the war ' (some formed a ' khaki pals' branch ' in France), in the post war period, the I.L.P. was firmly identified with unpopular pacificism. **60.**

The official Peace celebrations in the summer of 1919 coincided with the large NUAW north Shropshire / Staffordshire strike. In at least two centres of the strike, the Federation was active ; Grinshill, with its Ex - Service Band, and Gnosall, where the strike was to fail. (The WU was not involved in these disputes, except perhaps as strike breakers at Gnosall.) W.H.Edwards seems to have been busy that summer putting the whole weight of his union behind a Federation campaign against the Peace celebrations. At a special meeting where

half the Shrewsbury branch membership was present, a resolution was passed ' not to recognise the civic reception held on 5th August, but instead hold a public demonstration on 19th July.' The Shrewsbury Federation duly paraded, headed by the Grinshill Band, and a banner emblazoned : ' We want adequate pensions, employment and justice for all who have served during the war.' Although ' the attendance of members did not come up to expectations ', they heard speeches from Edwards, who estimated the ' between 200 and 300 discharged and demobilised men (were) at present out of work in that town '. He was supported by his fellow WU organiser, Arthur Flavell, who declared : ' It was all very well for towns like Shrewsbury and Wolverhampton to give men a good feed on one day, but what men wanted was to be in a position to get a good feed every day.' Although a Mr. Jones of Grinshill seconded the motion for 40s. pensions, significantly other Federation branches at Bishop's Castle and Much Wenlock voted to support the official celebrations. **61.**

As the Gnosall NUAW strike failed, Frank Organ, a national organiser of the farmworkers' union, expressed the bitterness probably felt by many ex - servicemen :

> During the war they were told that they, the labourers, were really the people that mattered, and the workers believed it . . . the cause of the unrest was that the eyes of the working man had been opened during the war, by being told that they were of the greatest importance to the life of the nation - they believed it. They were promised that if they went forth to the battlefields they would come back to a land that was a fit place for heroes to live in . . . Now the working class were asking the Government to cash that IOU, which they had failed to do. Now the last regiment of the working class - the agricultural labourers, were going to think and act with their fellow men (applause). They were coming rapidly into the union; they were being well officered and disciplined ; and the whole force of labour would be able to march forward.

In reality, employers were more hard nosed. When Edwards pressed a claim for his council workmen, Alderman How of Shrewsbury could see ' no reason why the working classes should think that they should suffer nothing but should gain hand over fist through the war.' **62.** The Federation was not proving the weapon for supporting the claims of the WU for which Edwards had hoped. Already in June 1919, the national leadership of the Federation had weakened links with the labour movement, and according to Keith Jeffrey :
' much of the steam was taken out of ex - servicemens' discontent by an increase in pensions during August. This was followed by a package of reforms which made provision for disabled men, gave veterans preferential treatment at labour exchanges and encouraged voluntary agencies to assist them.' **63.**

In September the Shrewsbury branch voted unanimously ' to discontinue . . . affiliation to the local Labour party '. Even Edwards saw the Federation as ' being non party, non sectarian and democratic, not supposed to be affiliated to any party . . . They would recognise that the Trades and Labour Council had rendered valuable service to the cause of the movement. But there happened to be one section of the party, the ILP, which did not want to be Labour, but something more . . . better sever their connection with the Labour Party.' Seconding the disaffiliation, Roy Littlewood, the secretary, complained that they ' could not do their work without being hampered by men of the Bolshevik type.' **64.**

The Federation was rapidly becoming a more conformist organisation ; processing in church parades at Bishop's Castle and Shrewsbury during the first anniversary celebrations of the Armistice and setting up a campaign for a county war memorial. A lingering sign of radicalism existed in the Oswestry and St. Martin's Federation where ' The members decided that on the day one of their members is to be evicted from his house at St. Martin's. They will march in a body and make a protest . . . at an ejectment order to a local farmer.' (It is likely that miners as well as farmworkers were represented amongst the membership here.) **65.** The Federation, as led by Edwards, seems to have suffered from a similar problem to the WU - an over - dependence on the bigger branches. In contrast, where the Federation had local support in the villages, it was NUAW dominated, and retained an element of support for the labour movement. So, Grinshill, with its NUAW branch and ex - service band, returned district councillor R. Smith for the Labour Party. Smith (see pp.101 - 102) campaigned on housing, another concern of the Federation. As an anonymous ex - serviceman wrote ; ' can you wonder why I am a Labour extremist . . . if that's they way the country treats the lads who had nothing to scrap for only the pigsties that they live in.' **66.**

However, the Federation's radicalism was threatened from another direction, as the Comrades of the Great War began to organise all over the county. The paternalistic ex - officer leadership was able to organise sponsorship for social activities, club premises and sometimes lavish entertainments at the country houses of rich members. Not for the first time, working men were bought off by cheap beer and skittles. **67.** Early in 1920, this was compounded by the government's willingness to donate the profits from wartime canteens in France to a united non - political ex - service organisation. The Federation in Shropshire was badly in debt, as only one fifth of its membership had paid their subscriptions. (A similar weakness to the farmworkers' unions.) When the size of the donation (£1.5 million), was known, the Federation had little choice but to join with its erstwhile rivals, the Comrades of the Great War. In January a new county committee was formed with Roy Littlewood as secretary, and by June, thirty two local committees had been formed to administer the

smooth formation of the British Legion, which by the end of the year had 5,000 Shropshire members. **68.**

The last radical fling of the Federation was when Edwards tried to put it at the disposal of Charles Duncan, the WU / Labour candidate during the Wrekin bye - election of February 1920. This too was a failure - Duncan was beaten by an independent candidate supported by jingoistic publisher Horatio Bottomley, ' cheered by a large crowd, including many ex - servicemen.' The Workers' Union **Record** confirmed that ' Bottomley's man used union attitudes to re - training ex - soldiers to win . .(he) used Soldiers and Sailors columns of **John Bull** to show what he had done for the discharged and demobilised men.' When a second bye - election occurred later in the year, Bottomley's candidate was Major - General Townshend - ' The Hero of Kut ', who enjoyed the active support of the British Legion, and who defeated Duncan again. **69.**

The swan song of the Federation in Shropshire was the unveiling of its war memorial in St. Mary's churchyard in Shrewsbury, a full two years before the ' official ' county memorial, but supported by the full military presence of Borough Police, KSLI band, Federation, Comrades, Boy Scouts, Girl Guides etc. with W. H. Edwards laying the first wreath (see Photograph 13). Edwards continued to be active campaigning for war pensions, and served as a British Legion officer until 1926, but the brief alliance between ex - servicemen and the labour movement was over. The British Legion, whilst officially not party political, had become part of the panoply of the establishment in Shropshire and was reinforced by the survival of gentry paternalism and ' local patriotism '. The alliance between farmworkers and ex - servicemen, whilst initially taking advantage of the confused feelings of returning soldiers, in the end diverted organising energies and probably weakened, rather than strengthened the WU, and was likely to have been a contributory cause of its demise. **70.**

Conclusions

A number of general conclusions can be made about the impact of the wider labour movement on the course and distribution of agricultural trades unionism in Shropshire. There was a trade union presence in Shrewsbury from the early nineteenth century, but it was mainly craft based and inward looking in its concerns. It did contribute a ' Lib - Lab ' element to the socialist movement in the town, which had developed around the turn of the century. However, this alliance had enough difficulty establishing a labour presence within the conservative county town and contributed little to the development of rural trade unionism. The same conclusion can be made about other market towns within the county. The small amount of local craft trade unionism seems to have disappeared with the rise of

mass production and even in towns like Oswestry, which developed a substantial mining and railway trade unionism, there seems to have been little interest in helping agricultural trades unionists in their neighbourhood. Socialist groups, organised on a national scale, like the Clarion Clubs, although meeting in Shropshire, failed entirely to connect with the farmworkers of the county.

The eastern Shropshire coalfield's labour tradition had been truncated in the mid - nineteenth century by the catastrophic decline of local industry. In the twentieth century the local labour movement had great difficulty in marshalling any sort of socialist influence amongst the disparate and disjointed working class communities of the area. Although the WU had a hold in the district, this may only be considered strong by Shropshire, not national standards. The WU's presence, although remarkably tenacious, had variable success in propagating growth in the surrounding rural areas, and was always in danger of being abandoned by regional or national leaderships. In the Clee hills, the mining and squatter traditions could only produce a weak labour presence, probably most successful on the co - operative side, and similarly had little impact on agricultural trades unionism.

The wider impact of the co - operative movement was similar to that of trades unionism. It developed mainly in the county's towns, and was the most successful part of the labour movement in the eastern coalfield, but it had difficulty (with a few exceptions) in expanding into the Shropshire countryside and therefore its impact on agricultural trades unionism was minimal. The spectactular growth of the radical ex - service organisations, which parallel that of post war trades unionism, held great potential for the farmworkers' unions. The Shropshire WU, sharing common political mores, put considerable resources into controlling the development of the Federation. This was wasted effort as their potential for change was soon blunted by central government's pension reforms, although in some localities the initial radical agenda of the ex - servicemen was acknowledged and absorbed by an NUAW dominated village Labour Party.

It was the organised railwaymen who had the greatest impact on agricultural trades unionism in Shropshire. The important role of individual railwaymen, described by some authorities as providing practical help and an ideological backbone for farmworkers, has been firmly located in Shropshire. The NUR's fruitful fraternal relationship with the NUAW at branch, regional and national level, was vital in nurturing the latter's fragile growth and maintaining its survival in the difficult years. The geographical distribution of strong agricultural trades unionism may also be attributed to organised railwaymen generally along the major railway routes and in particular in the south west of the county. Here the Craven Arms and Ludlow areas show the greatest influence on agricultural trades unionism by the NUR. However,

although at its peak the NUAW had a presence in most areas of the county, it can be speculated that certain of their branches on railway lines (e.g. Leebotwood and Dorrington south of Shrewsbury and Prees and Wem north of Shrewsbury) bear a direct correlation to village halts and a nearby NUR membership. It seems likely that the lack of a similar alliance between the NUR and WU contributed to the disappearance of the latter.

The rural Labour Party in Shropshire was comparatively weak. Even in districts with some industrial employment the party failed to capitalise on its potential working class constituency. Very few middle class members were prepared to demonstrate their opposition to the prevailing Conservative cultural hegemony. Aside from a few WU members in villages like Ellerdine, the role of the rural Labour Party in organising farmworkers' unions was very slight. Indeed, it was the other way round as the only Labour presence in the villages in so much of rural Shropshire was the local NUAW branch. Although this was mainly evident during General Elections, in the ' sandstone ' villages or the south west of the county, the ability of the NUAW to elect local councillors and influence local affairs approached the ' rural radicalism ' postulated by Howkins. In general we may conclude then that far from the wider labour movement contributing to the growth of agricultural trades unionism, it was organised farmworkers, virtually on their own, who created the wider labour movement in rural Shropshire.

1. For the general impact of the urban labour movement on rural trades unions from the 1830s see Groves op.cit., and Howkins **Poor Labouring Men** op.cit. For the TUC grants see Green **English Agricultural Labourer** op.cit. p.183.
2. William Kiddier **The Old Trades Unions - From Unprinted Records of the Brushmakers** (1931) pp.15, 17 and 51. No information on Chartism in Shrewsbury has been located in contrast to the movement in the Ironbridge Gorge (see footnote 13 below). **Eddowe's Shropshire Journal** 20.12.71 and 20.3.72. Shropshire farmworkers in the early nineteenth century seem to have been less riotous than in other parts of England, see Hobsbawn and Rude op.cit. pp.168, 202, 305, and 351. There is also evidence that one of the few ' Swing ' incidents was attributable to a Whitchurch attorney's clerk seeking personal revenge see George Glover **Shropshire Eccentrics** (1991) pp.21 - 22.
3. For bricklayers see interview with Thomas Pace in **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 18.7.19, and for bookbinders see Ibid 18.7.19 and 28.3.24 (where bookbinders had the ' strongest trade union branch of women in town '). E.B. Blake, local bookbinders' leader, was a county councillor (Ibid 31.7.25) and had a national role in his union, see Clement J.Bundock **The Story of the NUPB & PW** (1959) p. 220.

4. **Eddowe's Shropshire Journal** 20.3.72, see 13.3.72 for the Nine Hours movement in Ludlow. Malcolm Wanklyn has also found evidence of organised printers in Bridgnorth in the 1860s. For the decline of crafts in villages and small towns see J.A.Chartes **Country Tradesmen** in G.E.Mingay **The Victorian Countryside** (1980).

5. The records of the Trades Council were burnt in the early 1970s. (Letter to author from P.R.Kelly, Secretary 19.7.92) The date of foundation is from a letter to the **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 12.8.21 from E.B.Blake. The demonstration is described in SRO M14433/1 **Salopian Socialist Labour Annual 1904**.

6. Ibid., **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 3.4.03 and 17.4.03. (The latter issue also has a report of Hardie's lecture at Wellington chaired by John Beard) Another socialist candidate stood in the same election as Morris but was defeated. Interestingly, Morris' Cafe competed for the business of trade union events with the Shrewsbury Co-operative Society's cafe (See **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 31.3.22.) Whilst fairly unusual, the support of a prominent local businessman like Morris for socialism is not unique - Edward Burgess, a Norwich businessman ran the local socialist / radical paper **Daylight** and was president of George Edwards' first union, see **Edwards** op.cit. p.57.

7. For Pace see **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 18.7.19, 19.10.23 and 4.3.27. The Liberals fielded other Parliamentary candidates between these dates. He gave a ' meat tea ' for 40 employees (Ibid 19.11.20). Again his career as a prosperous business man and labour movement activist is parallelled by Alfred Slingsby of Cambridge. (Interview 16.3.97 Fred Mansfield of Cambridge b. 1912)

8. For Hemmerde see **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 28.3.03, who also stood as a Liberal candidate in North - West Norfolk in 1912 (Howkins **Poor Labouring Men** op.cit.p.122), and was later Labour M.P. for Crewe (**Labour's Who's Who** 1924).

9. For the suffrage movement see reports in **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 5.7.12 (When Ludlow Post Office window was smashed by a Shrewsbury suffragette) and 4.10.12 (When Lawrence Houseman ' brother of the literary gentleman ' addressed a meeting at Shrewsbury Music Hall). Two Manchester suffragettes were prosecuted, along with local farmer's wife Emma Jones for distributing pacifist leaflets at Prees army camp **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 29.6.17. The movement was stronger just over the border in Montgomeryshire, see Angela V.John **Run Like Blazes - The Suffragettes and Welshness** Llafur Vol.6 No.3 1994 p.32. For May Day see **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 10.5.12 and 10.10.19 and above p.97 - 98.

10. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 24.10.19, 10.9.20, 11.3.21 and 22.9.22. For Shrewsbury in the 1930s see Wanklyn loc.cit.p.6.

11. Denis Pye **Fellowship is Life - The National Clarion Cycling Club** (1995) p.17 (Quoting **London Evening News** 16.4.1895) and Letter from same author 25.11.94. (The Clarion Easter meet took place in Shrewsbury in 1900, 1908, 1914, 1922 and 1928.) Pye p. 23 mentions that at the unveiling of the Clarion van in 1914 ' conflict between Clarionettes

and soldiers of the Shropshire Light Infantry was threatened but the men from the barracks were soon won over.' (The wider labour movement in Shropshire clearly found the task of ' making socialists ' harder !) NMLH 1993.8.9 Programme of 20th. Annual Meet Shrewsbury 1914, **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 21.4.1900 and **Clarion** May 1928.

12. Barrie Trinder **The Industrial Revolution in Shropshire** (1973) pp. 313, 383 and 392.

13. Ibid.p. 313. See also Mick Jenkins **The General Strike of 1842** (1980) pp.61 and 207 and Trinder op.cit.pp.390 and 398. For a debate on the extent of the Midlands Chartist / miners' strike of 1842 see the exchange of letters between George J. Barnsby and C.P. Griffin in **Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History** Nos. 22, 23, 25 and 27.

14. Irene Gregory **The East Shropshire Coalfield in the Great Depression** M.A.Thesis Keele University 1978. pp. 190 - 191 and Wanklyn loc.cit.p.11. There was an attempt to set up a miners' union in 1872. Although the conclusion of the report of a meeting addressed by Thomas Halliday in Madeley was over optimistic : ' The Shropshire men have usually kept aloof from such movements, or have only partially patronised them. Now, however seeing the advantages gained by their friends of South Staffordshire ...large numbers have joined.' **Eddowe's Shropshire Journal** 24.7.72.

15. Gregory op.cit.pp.128, 154, 133 and 139. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 22.3.12, 14.6.12, 27.6.24, 22.8.24 and 6.11.25. (Only four more newspaper references have been located to William Latham, the SMA's general secretary and these relate to his Labour party activities.)

16. Ibid. 17.10.19 and 23.1.20. Pye op.cit.p. 23 has identified an I.L.P. branch in Madeley in 1895, formed after a visit from a Clarion van.

17. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 10.11.22 and 24.8.23. WU **Record** October 1923.

18. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 27.6.24 and 22.8.24, SWLM p.105. The owners of the Hanwood pits were paternalistic gentry : ' Miners walked from Pulverbatch to Hanwood to work in the pits then back again at the end of the day. The mine owner (Nick Fielden born at Condover Hall) would give them a lift in his car, dust covered clothes and all, if he passed them on their way.' Ibid.p.170. These mines closed in 1934.

19. **Ludlow Advertiser** 7.4.23, **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 23.1.20, SWLM p.173 and A.E.Jenkins **Titterstone Clee Hills : Everyday Life Industrial History and Dialect** (1982) pp. 41 and 113.

20. SWLM pp. 29, 45 and 46. (Highley sent flying pickets to Madeley in the 1921 dispute to confront alleged strikebreakers.)

21. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 20.4.20 and 3.4.03, **Wellington Journal** 2.7.19, **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 16.11.28, **Methodist Who's Who** (1933), NUR **Annual Report** 1920, NUAW Records B V III List of Members 1920 and **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 24.7.17

22. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 19.11.18, 29.11.18, 13.12.18, 7.3.19, 3.3.22, 22.9.22, 10.11.22, 17.11.22 and 17.10.24. Clwyd Record Office North Wales Miners' Association

(NWMA) D/NM/65 **Annual Report** 1918 and EC Minutes D/NM/2 . Morris had previously tried to secure the miners' candidature for East Denbighshire. He had been elected to the NWMA EC as early as 1913 and was Vice President in 1917. He finished his career with the union as Finance and Compensation Secretary in 1954. Morris was first cousin to Billy Hughes, the Australian Labour Prime Minister, whose family came from this area. The Oswestry constituency include large areas of rural north - east Shropshire. For the NWMA generally see Sally Venn **Labour Politics in North East Wales. A Study of the NWMA 1898 - 1947** M.A. thesis University of North Wales, Bangor 1994.

23. **New Leader** 13.4.23 and 20.4.23. (The first quote is from George Benson I.L.P. Treasurer) For the Ludlow bye - election see above pp. 84 - 85. For a general discussion of these issues see Ross McKibbin **The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910 - 1924** pp.152 - 153 and Christopher Howard **Expectations born to death : local Labour party expansion in the 1920s** in Jay Winter **The Working Class in Modern British History** (1983) pp. 67, 70 and 71. The problem of rural areas for Labour was not confined to England, see Deian Hopkin **The Rise of Labour in Wales 1890 - 1914** Llafur Vol.6 No.3 1994 and Kenneth O. Morgan **The New Liberalism and the Challenge of Labour : The Welsh Experience 1885 - 1929** in Kenneth D. Brown **Essays in Anti - Labour History : Responses to the Rise of Labour in Britain** (1974).

24. NMLH, Labour Party Archives JSM / RUR 1 - 6 Advisory Committee on Rural Problems 1919 - 1920 and Labour Party **Conference Report** 1925 p.272.

25. **New Leader** 27.4.23.(The slightly patronising writer, John Beckett, later joined the British Union of Fascists)

26. **Labour Organiser** April / May 1923.

27. Noel Buxton **Labour and the Land** Labour May / April 1927 and Labour Party **Conference Report** 1928 p.251, the response was that of Mr A.V.Bond of Banbury DLP. For a similar Shropshire example see William Fielding's speech at the joint NUAW/NUR meeting at Craven Arms **Shropshire Chronicle** 22.6.23. The paucity of Labour middle class support in rural Shropshire is illustrated by the lack of reference to these issues in Ida Gandy **An Idler on the Shropshire Border** (1970) even though her husband had been a local party chairman. Howkins loc.cit.p.150.

28. Raymond Williams **The Social Significance of 1926** Llafur Vol. 2 No. 2 Spring 1977 p.5.

29. For the NUR see P. S. Bagwell **The Railwaymen** (1963), Williams loc.cit. p. 5, although Duncan Tanner points out, (op.cit. p.397) only half of NUR members paid the political levy in 1918, this had changed dramatically by 1926.

30. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 1.4.27, Howkins **Poor Labouring Men** op.cit. p.111, Groves op. cit.p.129, Green **Awakening** op.cit. p.320, S.J.Gee loc.cit and **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 14.5.26. For an example of the support of Irish railwaymen for farmworkers' disputes see

Emmet O' Connor **Agrarian Unrest and the Labour Movement in County Waterford 1917 - 1923** Saothar No.6 1980 p.48.

31. NUR **Annual Reports** 1908 to 1918, Waites op.cit. p.140 links the wartime NUR growth with the shortage of labour in the countryside, for Oswestry see p.114 above.

32. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 14.9.17, 25.10.29, for Jackson see numerous reports between 19.11.14 to 26.10.29, for Tipton 24.10.30, for Allen see 31.7.25, 16.12.27 and 25.10.29 and for the conference see 22.6.28. For Craven Arms see 17.10.24 and **New Leader** 27.4.23.

33. Mutch loc.cit p. 60, TUC **Annual Report** 1925 pp.240 - 241 and **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 17.8.23.

34. Ibid 22.11.18.

35. **The Landworker** January 1921.

36. NUAW Records EC Minutes 28.12.16.

37. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 23.11.17, **The Labourer** January 1918, **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 21.5.20, 5.11.20 and 28.10.17. For a view of a Shropshire postman who does not mention the union, see Simon Evans **Round About the Crooked Steeple** (1931). The Postmen's Federation did organise in some of the villages (see SRO CP/177/1/1/2 Lydbury North Parish Minute Book), see also John Gorman **Images of Labour** (1985) p.174.

38. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 22.6.23, the words are those of Lunnon, Fielding and E. Browning, the NUR secretary.

39. Ibid 12.7.19, 26.9.19 and 3.10.19, E. W. Gladstone **The Shropshire Yeomanry 1795 - 1945** (1953) p.196. and Green op.cit. pp.309 - 310.

40. WU **Record** October 1920, Pretty op.cit. pp.72 - 23 and 89 - 90. W.H.Edwards was also the chairman of the Montgomeryshire Labour Party **Wellington Journal** 2.7.19. However just over the border at Landrillo, Merioneth, a NUAW branch was started by two railwaymen as early as 1918 see Edward and Ruth Frow **Hendwr The Story of a Farm** (1992). p. 19.

41. A.M.Carr Saunders, P.Sargeant, Robert Peers, **Consumer Co - operatives in Great Britain** (1938) pp. 7 - 8. I am also grateful to the late Roy Garratt and Gill Lonergan of the Co - operative Union Library for preparing a list of Shropshire co - operatives based on Co - operative Congress **Annual Reports**, hereafter Co - op Union.

42. Co - op Union. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 24.11.16, 9.3.17, 30.3.17, 23.9.17, 14.12.17, 18.4.18, 9.5.19, 22.8.19, 6.5.21 and 2.11.23.

43. Ibid 11.2.16.

44 Co - op Union, David Castledine **Co - operative Stores in North - East Wales**, Clwyd Historian Autumn 1994. No. 33 p. 27, SWLM p.126, **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 24.2.22 and SWLM p.29.

45. Co - op Union, Kelly's **Directories** 1879, 1885, 1891, 1895, 1905 and 1929, David Neave **Mutual Aid in the Victorian countryside : Friendly Societies in the Rural East**

Riding 1830 - 1914 (1991) p. 49. The Bourton estate celebrated the son and heir's wedding in the usual paternalistic way in 1872 see **Eddowe's Shropshire Journal** 9.10.72.

46. Co - op Union, Stamper op.cit. p. 68, B. E. Simmonds **Brown Clee Liberty and Clee St. Margaret** (1982) pp.18 and 71. (Simmonds does not seem to be aware of the co - operative in the village.) See **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 23.1.20, for the Quarrymen's union on the Clees. Viscount Boyne still holds the yearly Burwarton Show, with classes for poultry and others cottagers' entries.

47. Co - op Union, Kelly's **Directories** 1913, 1924, 1934, **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 29.2.18, 23.1.20 and Beard op.cit. p.97. (John Simpson also set up the Co - operative Insurance Society in Birmingham.)

48. Beard op.cit. p.23, Watts op.cit. p. 225, Stamper op.cit. p. 69, SWLM p. 239. NUAW Records EC Minutes 21.6.23, 20.2.24, 14.5.24 and 20.8.24. The branch even had its own collector 15.9.24.

49. No account exists of ex - service organisations, but see Graham Wootton **The History of the British Legion** (1956), Howkins **Poor Labouring Men** op.cit. p.128, Nick Mansfield **Class Conflict and Village War Memorials 1914 - 24** Rural History (1995) 6, 1, and David Englander **The NUX and the Labour Movement 1918 - 20** History Vol. 76 (1991).

50. NUAW Records B VI 3 Report of the 10th General Council Meeting 1918.

51. Major W. de B. Wood (ed) **The History of the KSLI in the Great War 1914 - 18** (1925) p.207. No figures are available on the number of Shropshire farmworkers who enlisted. Groves op.cit.p.149 states that 250,000 farmworkers volunteered nationally , with another 150,000 conscripted. Green **Awakening** op.cit. p.217, gives a figure of 200,000 volunteers, one quarter of all farmworkers. Peter Simpkins **Kitchener's Army - The Raising of the New Armies 1914 - 1916** (1988) p.107, suggests that 15.6% of agricultural labourers enlisted in the forces compared to 15.1% of industrial workers. This is challenged by P.E.Dewey **Military Recruiting and the British Labour Force during the First World War** Historical Journal 27 1984 p. 219, who suggests that the proportion of agricultural industry workforce enlisting was slightly less than the national average, although this does include farmers and their families.

52. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 10.11.19 and Simon Evans **The Poet Postman of Cleobury Mortimer** (1981) p.4. The literature on post war trauma is reviewed in Adrian Gregory **The Silence of Memory - Armistice Day 1919 - 1946** (1995).

53. Green op.cit.p. 310, Gervase Philips **Dai Bach Y Soldiwr - Welsh Soldiers in the British Army 1914 - 18** Llafur Vol. 6 No. 2 (1993) p.103, Gloden Dallas and Douglas Gill **The Unknown Army - Mutinies in the British Army in World War I** (1985) p.44, **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 9.6.16.

54. The words are those of Rhondda Williams, Labour Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Cambridge, speaking to the local Federation in the **Cambridge Daily News** 4.12.18 and

Captain Trowse of the Comrades **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 21.3.19. The banner slogan is from the Shepherd's Bush branch banner, from a glass negative in the John Gorman Collection at the National Museum of Labour History. The fact that the Federation carried banners indentical in style to those of trade unions, in itself points to close links between the two movements.

55. Ibid 30.7.20. For wartime profiteering see Hollins op.cit. p.4 and SRO SC51/1A1 Labour Sub - Committee Minutes 10.11.18.

56. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 12.10.17, 23.11.17 and 30.11.17.

57. The term is used by Hyman op. cit. p.82. See **Daily Citizen** 8.12.14 for WU and other trade union enlistment figures.

58. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 15.12.18, 6.9.18, 20.9.18, 15.11.18, 22.11.18 and 13.12.18.

59. Ibid 6.12.18 and 21.3.19.

60. Ibid 9.5.19, 16.5.19 and Englander loc.cit. p.30. For an I.L.P. meeting broken up by the University Officer Training Corps see **Cambridge Daily News** 8.3.19.

61. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 28.2.19 and 25.7.19. It is possible that the WU's inaction during the 1919 strikes was because W.H.Edwards was so preoccupied with the Federation.

62. Ibid 3.10.19 and 31.10.19. (How was a local solicitor, see Kelly's **Directory** 1919.)

63. Keith Jeffrey **The Post War Army** in F. W. Beckett and Keith Simpson **A Nation in Arms, a Social Study of the British Army in the First World War** (1985) pp. 229 - 230.

64. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 26.9.19.

65. Ibid 14.11.19, 2.1.20 and 16.1.20. (Tom Morris, see footnote 22 above, lived in St. Martin's.)

66. Ibid 14.11.19 and 24.9.20.

67. Ibid 6.12.18, 21.3.19, (For Major Leighton's appeal for furniture for the Shrewsbury club) 31.1.20, (For the Victory Ball at Stokesay Court hosted by the Allcroft family, see p.170 - 171, involving 450 guests of the Craven Arms and Ludlow Comrades), 22.10.20 (For a Comrades dance at Ludlow, a carnival at Madeley and a new club at Church Stretton). For some general discussion of these issues see John Benson **The Working Class in Britain 1850 - 1939** (1989) p.199.

68. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 16.1.20, 6.2.20, 11.6.20 and 19.11.20. Elsewhere the formation of the Legion led to conflict, and even then, in Norfolk, the Legion could still be left wing in some of its actions, see Howkins **Poor Labouring Men** op.cit. p.171.

69. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 27.2.20, 12.11.20, 19.11.20 and 29.11.20, and WU **Record** March 1920. General Townshend soon joined the Conservative Party, his military reputation has not stood the test of time, see S.L.Mayer **Wars of the 20th Century** (1975) p.148.

70. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 17.9.20, 8.10.20 and 1.10. 26.

Chapter 6 - Explanations centring on the structure of the Shropshire agrarian economy

This chapter will offer explanations for the growth and distribution of agricultural trades unionism based on the types of farming and the overall structure of the agrarian economy in Shropshire. In particular, it will concentrate on the role of farmworkers within the county's major industry. The chapter will examine the physical geography of the region in relation to settlement and farming practices. It will evaluate the major agricultural trends over time ; the roles of gentry and large estates, of cottagers and smallholdings and the relationship of farming to the industrial areas of the county. It will focus on the pride of farmworkers in the their jobs, the survival of the living - in system and hiring fairs, and relate these to the debate on ' structural conflict '. Historians of farmworkers and their unions have largely been uninterested in trying to assess the economic factors which might have determined union growth in particular localities. (The exceptions to this, Brown and to a certain extent Howkins, are discussed later.)

The chapter will argue that although these geographical and economic factors are useful for understanding trends which were likely to affect trade unionism, such is the varied nature of agriculture, even within one county, that hard evidence is lacking for proving a causal relationship. Nevertheless an attempt will be made to decide if the farming types and demographic changes in various districts within the county had an effect on trades unionism. Similarly it will investigate possible explanations based on the strength of both landed estates and the continuance of commoners' rights. It will conclude by examining the behaviour of farmworkers and whether they took part in ' structural conflict ' or were more concerned with occupational hierarchies, and if these factors affected the growth and distribution of agricultural trades unionism in the various districts of the county.

Physical geography

Shropshire was, and still is, by and large, a rural county remote from major centres of population and important routes of communication. It is the largest inland English county, so its boundaries encompass wide and complex variations in physical geography, which influence land use and types of farming. Large parts of Shropshire, particularly the west and south, are hilly, and this serves to reinforce its sense of remoteness. In the pre - industrial period the cultural contrast with the neighbouring Welsh highlands compounded this feeling. Although not so far removed from the capital as other rural areas, Shropshire was inward looking, anti - metropolitan and culturally conservative. Its gentry wintered in Shrewsbury or Ludlow, not in Bath or London. Although briefly in the late eighteenth century Shropshire's

own industrial area was technologically significant, it rapidly lost its lead, and the cultural dynamism of the more entrepreneurial areas of Britain was almost consciously rejected by the county. Although there is little to judge directly the outlook of farmworkers, as will be discussed in the next chapter, evidence suggests that they were likely to share the cultural myopia of the county gentry, and were not susceptible to new developments, particularly those which smacked of radicalism and later socialism.

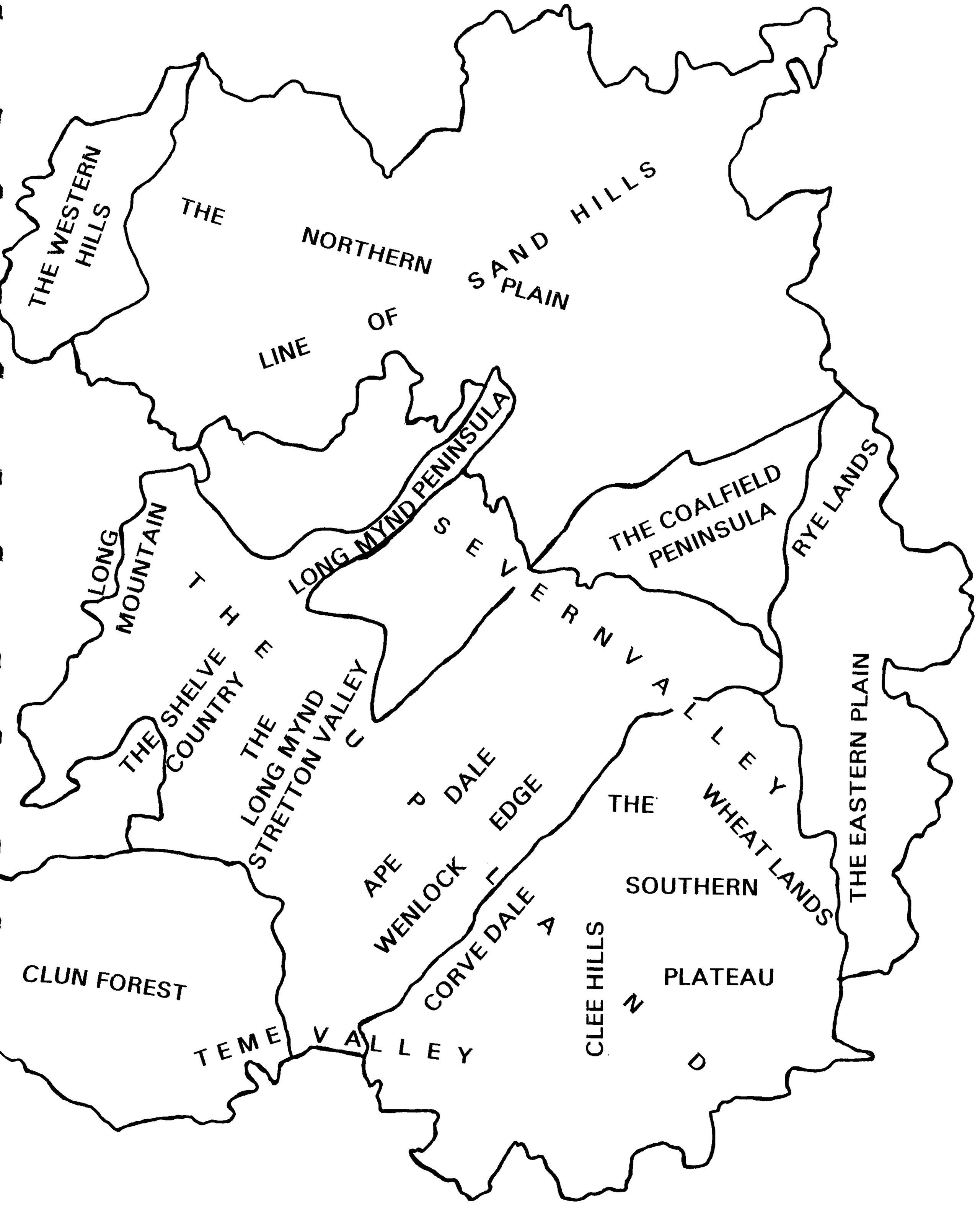
The physical geography of the country also affected its communication systems. This applied to local networks, as well as national road systems. With the exception of the A5, London to Holyhead road, Shropshire countained no major road route of national significance. The rise of an industrial area in the east of the county in the late eighteenth century was a spur to improved communications. Initially this meant the river Severn and associated canals which were also used for transporting farm produce, famously cheese from the Whitchurch area. Although railways only arrived in the county in 1849, by 1900, the main North/South railway link between the South Wales coalfield and the industrial North traversed the length of Shropshire rather than the Welsh mountains. Supplementary lines to the Wrexham coalfield, the North Wales coastal resorts and the industrial west Midlands, increased the importance of Shropshire as a major junction, and gave a new impetus to market towns like Ludlow, Oswestry and Whitchurch, as well as creating new railway centres like Craven Arms. Railways increased opportunities for travel and as was explained in Chapter 5 (see pp.119 to 121), it was the railways, particularly the intellectual communication which they made possible and the solidarity with other groups of workers which they revealed, that created opportunities for agricultural trades unionists. The importance of this was not eclipsed by the development of road transport after 1918.

By 1937 the local railway system had grown so much that the ' only points more than six miles from a railway occur about the Clun Forest, the Shelve country and the Onny valley '. **1.** However, local railways were often financially unsound. The Bishop's Castle Railway, for example, never made money during its seventy year history. Nevertheless, railways brought implements, fertilisers and consumer goods to Shropshire farmers. They also gave farmers the chance to supply outside markets, particularly milk, to the conurbations of the west Midlands and south Lancashire. However, even in the progressive dairy farming areas of north Shropshire this was not fully exploited. The emphasis remained on cheesemaking, leaving milk supply to farmers adjacent to the industrial areas.

Agriculture was further affected by climate. The hilly nature of the southern part of the county, together with the nearness of the Welsh massif, and the prevailing westerly weather systems, meant that the climate was comparatively wet and cold. In the 1930s the temperature range between summer and winter was a high 24 degrees. In winter the average Shropshire temperature was cooler than Shetland, 500 miles to the north. For farmers this meant that the average harvest was three weeks later than in eastern England, with its long hot summers. **2.** Especially in the upland parts of the county, climate and physical geography often dictated what could be grown. On the Clee Hills, this meant hay, since ' the cold and wet did not allow grain to be grown so high above sea level '. The short growing season caused the pre-mechanised Shropshire farmer to be very concerned about the weather's potential for disrupting processes. Even today, the hay harvest, so vital for winter animal feed, is conducted with a slightly manic edge, and a weather eye. **3.**

The major physical division in the county is that between the lowlands of the north and the hills of the south, with the river Severn broadly forming the boundary between the two. On top of this major cleavage, many variations influence soil types and settlement to give very localised farming systems, which will now be discussed. According to Dorothy Sylvester : ' Every ridge and dale . . . is highly individual in both its structure and relief . . . innumerable pays here form perfect examples of the French concept of the small sub-region.' **4.**

The edges of Shropshire often shared the characteristics of neighbouring counties. In the north, the fertile flatlands which are the continuation of the Cheshire plain, were dissected by a line of sandstone hills, and are dotted with post-glacial meres, gravels and ' mosses '. The uplands west of Oswestry were for all practical purposes part of the Welsh hills, retaining Welsh culture and even language. The eastern sandstone plain of Shropshire, was similar to neighbouring Staffordshire. South of the Severn, the Clun Forest is almost identical to bordering Radnorshire, and south-east Shropshire blended imperceptibly into the orchard country of Hereford and the Wyre Forest of Worcester. This often resulted in the trades unionism in these parts of the county sharing the characteristics of that in neighbouring counties. (see pp.69 and 145) Sylvester's view of Shropshire as ' pays ' country is typified by the geologically complex southern uplands, ' the highest and most barren land in the English border ' , where the Long Mynd or the Shelve country existed cheek by jowl with productive areas like the Stretton valley or Corvedale. **5.** Agriculture, even here, has historically reacted to market forces. ' The Wheatlands ', the name earned by the plateau east of the Clee Hills during the grain expansion of the Napoleonic Wars, and the ' high farming ' of the nineteenth century, remained even after this ' pays ' reverted to the pastoral county norm.



Map 3 The physical geography and farming 'pays' of Shropshire, after Watts op.cit.4

The size of parishes, and the traditional pattern of settlement, varied throughout the county. In the north and west, nucleated villages were common. In the north - east, particularly around reclaimed heathland, planned farms and cottages were the norm. In the south and east, small parishes with isolated hamlets and farmsteads were characteristic, and in the uplands, inhospitable, isolated areas co-existed with large villages which housed the labour force. Market towns were found at regular intervals. Watts, in particular, identified locations conforming to a ' ten mile rule ', of market outlets found within an easy return day's journey for a horse and cart, within Shropshire and its immediate borders. **6.**

Types of agriculture

' From mid Cheshire to the south Shropshire hills, the coutry is one vast stretch of greensward - excellent cattle pasture broken only by parkland and occasional villages and hamlets.' **7.** Sylvester's overall impression of the predominance of pastoral agriculture is confirmed by statistics. In 1933, at the end of our period, 5/8ths of the county (over 1/2 million acres), was under permanent pasture, not including clover and seeded grassland. Only 1/10th of the entire acreage was growing grain. **8.** Traditionally, climate, physical geography and soil type dictated this emphasis on the pastoral, but it was accelerated by national farming trends in the nineteenth century. During the Napoleonic Wars, high bread prices encouraged ploughing up of long established grasslands, even risking poor crops in elevated situations. However, Shropshire's improving landlords and farmers worked to the county's inherent strengths, and concentrated on stock breeding. Even their plant breeding improvements, like the early clover growing in the ' Ryelands ' east of the Severn or the turnips pioneered on the Walcot estate in the late eighteenth century, concentrated on crops which could be fed to animals. **9.** The Repeal of the Corn Laws, and the arrival of overseas grain and meat imports from the 1870s, did not depress Shropshire agriculture by comparison with more arable based rural economies. It did increase the dependence on grassland, with a rise of 1/3rd between 1875 and 1913. Strategically motivated attempts to increase arable acreage, such as the government ' ploughing up ' campaign of 1917 - 18, met with a slow response, especially in the north of the county, with a modest increase of only 26,985 acres. **10.** Shropshire agriculturalists were inclined to work with the inherent qualities of their green county.

Union organisers and activists were working against the overall trend to pastoralise with a consequent decrease in the numbers of farmworkers per holding, which made it increasingly difficult to recruit and particularly retain membership, especially in the more remote areas. So in areas like Oswestry, despite the advantage of a strong wider labour movement,

the small hill farms which used mainly family labour in pastoral agriculture, resulted in very weak NUAW branches (see pp.68 and 116 - 117).

This emphasis on grassland conceals enormous differences in types of farming practised in different parts of the county between 1900 and 1930. In the north, the heavy clay soils were favourable to dairying. However, distance from centres of population, and perhaps conservative traditionalism, caused production to concentrate on cheese rather than milk. In 1915, 1/4 of Cheshire cheese was actually made in Shropshire, making it the fourth largest cheese producing county in England, with Whitchurch as its market town. It is no wonder that agricultural trades unionism in the north of the county shared in the variable success of that of Cheshire. Indeed a resolution at the 1926 NUAW biennial conference suggested ' that the dairying area of Shropshire be included with Cheshire for the purpose of fixing wages etc. as those members are working under exactly the same conditions as Cheshire.' **11.**

The trend towards cheese production intensified as the milk demand from Lancashire was pushed further southward down the Cheshire plain. Women traditionally played an important part in making cheese, although the size of farms varied from the small family unit, like Fordhall Farm near Market Drayton, described by Arthur Hollins, to the larger dairy farms in the more infertile sands around Wem. By 1930 cheese production was shifting from labour intensive farmhouse production to small factories. Other large scale enterprises for processing milk, like those built by the Cadbury Brothers to supply their chocolate factories, had made their appearance. However, as has been previously discussed, neither union took great interest in recruiting women, and not for another generation was the NUAW to start enrolling ex - farmworkers now employed in food processing industries, which was to save it from bankruptcy in the 1960s. **12.**

In the north west of the county, dairying was combined with upland grazing, in the all but Welsh hills west of Oswestry. In the north east, farming was more mixed with some arable, although this was mainly barley used predominantly to feed cattle. The rich alluvial soils of the Severn and its tributaries, particularly between Melverley and Shrewsbury, specialised in the grazing of ' store cattle ' for beef production. The small scale nature of these specialised units, with an emphasis on family labour, resulted in a low number of farmworkers per holding, thus creating a relatively poor environment for the unions. Graziers brought cattle from Wales or even Ireland, and fattened them up for sale at Shrewsbury market, still in 1911 second only to Norwich in this skilled business. **13.**

Only around the Shropshire coalfield area, which, although declining, still contained a large population, was there a local demand for milk. Some fruit and vegetable market gardening

was also found in the area for the same reason. Although there was a comparatively strong WU presence in this district, this had more to do with its existing industrial support in the Shropshire ' Black Country ', than the type of agriculture practised there. The establishment of a CWS jam factory at Roden was encouraged by its closeness to urban areas, and the co - operative political culture nurtured a strong NUAW branch here. **14.**

The eastern sandstone plain of Shropshire, on the left bank of the Severn, stretches from Newport to below Bridgnorth. This relatively fertile and comparatively drier ' Ryelands ' tended to look east and its agriculture was similar to neighbouring Staffordshire, with mixed arable farming. This involved a Norfolk 4 or 5 course rotation, with an emphasis on barley, with the livestock element being provided by both cattle and sheep. This area has been identified as an area of NUAW strength in the county, at least in the number of branches found in the district. This may be related to the mixed general agriculture found here, with a larger number of workers per farm holding, although the lack of surviving evidence on the number of members in each ' Ryeland ' branch makes this conclusion tentative. Surprisingly, the nearness of the Black Country seems to have had relatively little influence in determining demand and dictating cultivation, suggesting that Shropshire farmers were often conservative in their production and marketing.

From 1911, sugar beet began replacing turnips and other root crops. This led to a further decline in the ' folding ' of sheep (the eating of the green tops of turnips as they grew in the field) as part of the rotation. Essentially a strategic crop supported by post - war government guaranteed price, sugar beet production was enhanced by the building of a factory at Allscott in 1928. This was achieved by a certain amount of lobbying : ' farming became so unprofitable, well to do farmers in the eastern part of Shropshire where the land is lighter than the rest they became interested in growing the crop.' with ' the NFU pressurising (sic) for a factory on the lighter lands.' Edith Picton - Turberville, recently elected Labour M.P. for The Wrekin, was also involved in the campaign for the sugar beet factory to be sited in Shropshire. Describing the increase in acreage of sugar beet from 99 in 1924 to 10,000 by the end of the decade as : ' Like a romance...in addition to the extra men engaged in the growth of sugar beet and the benefit to the farmer...there were 380 workers in this direction '. Her view has been confirmed in hindsight by farmers like John Foster : ' The farmers knew their prices... it created employment, it was all singled and cleaned by hand, pulled and carted (not elevated). All winter work for the farmer and the men... It raised the standard of farming.' Madden claims that the NUAW was ambivalent to sugar beet, being particularly concerned that it would decrease winter corn threshing work for its members. However from the 1930s the sugar beet subsidy was supported by Edwin Gooch, the union's President, who

realised its potential for stabilising farming and correctly foresaw the recruiting possibilities in the factories. **15.**

Superficially, the whole of the south Shropshire hills had similarities, with rugged uplands existing alongside fertile valleys. However, this again disguises quite distinctive patterns of pastoral agriculture, which were fairly long lasting. The Clun Forest of the far south - west, retaining a Welsh culture, was the centre for the breeding of Kerry and Clun sheep, which was organised in sheep walks. The Shelve country contained small scale farming, associated with lead mining, and the Long Mynd had degenerated into grouse moors and rough grazing. To the east, the Clee Hills and the ' Wheatlands ' plateau contained more mixed farming, as well as the smallholding associated with mining and quarrying. All these barren hills were juxtaposed with some of the richest farmland in Shropshire, like the Stretton valley, Corvedale, and parts of the Teme Valley. Here the land was part pastoral and part arable. Rich crops of barley, hay and roots were grown for animal feed, alongside specialist livestock breeding of Hereford cattle and heavy horses. These ' secret ' valleys were also the home of well established gentry families, like the Corbetts of Longnor and the Plowdens of Plowden, who claimed to have been there from before the Norman conquest.

Parts of south Shropshire adjoining Herefordshire and Worcestershire shared similar agriculture to those counties. So in the extreme south - east of the county, fruit orchards of various types were common, cider production was locally important, and valleys like the Teme, as it rolled in to Herefordshire, were centres for raising Hereford cattle. Again there is little to suggest that local agriculture was a direct cause of the strong NUAW presence in the villages of the south - west. Corvedale and the Clun valley had very similar agriculture, yet in the former only one NUAW branch has been traced for the whole of the period, whilst the latter district was one of the NUAW ' strongholds ' in the county. Here the important road and railway junction of Craven Arms created a micro version of a Labour culture, centred around the NUR branch and the knowledge of other branches up and down the line, which largely contributed to this phenomenon.

Sheep farming and trading with Wales had laid the foundations for mediaeval prosperity for Shropshire. Although the wool trade had moved elsewhere by the late eighteenth century, sheep were still found all over the county in both upland and lowland farming systems. As late as 1939 there were over 540,000 sheep in Shropshire, outnumbering people by over two to one. **16.** In the nineteenth century, Shropshire stock breeding was seen as progressive with the scientific development of the Shropshire breed overshadowing older hill strains like the Clun Forest and Kerry Hills. The town of Craven Arms was deliberately planned in the

late Victorian period as a sheep market on a convenient railway junction. By 1911, over 30,000 sheep from Shropshire and the Welsh borders were sold there each year. **17.**

Mechanisation was widespread, but as a mainly pastoral county, much of the arable machinery was inappropriate in Shropshire. The small corn harvest continued to be cut by hand until the Great War, with reapers only introduced slowly. Wanklyn has found them mentioned in only 30% of farm sales in 1873. Steam ploughing, common in grain growing areas, was unsuitable for Shropshire hills, too inflexible for comparatively small fields, and did not realise the expected economies of scale. However, as the repeal of the Corn Laws intensified Shropshire's pastoral trend, the mechanisation of yard work took place in the county as root choppers, chaff and hay cutters, and cattle cake crushers, powered by small steam and later, oil engines, became a common way of saving labour. On the larger estates, such as the Duke of Sutherland's at Lilleshall, integrated barn systems, similar to those developed in Norfolk or Cheshire, were also used. **18.**

Building on local expertise, using the new railway links, and proximity to the metal industries of the west Midlands, agricultural implement makers increased in size. Offering a wide range of products, firms like Corbetts of Shrewsbury rose to national and international prominence. This diversification of the employment opportunities available to some farm workers and their families in nearby towns, increased their standard of living. By providing opportunities for ambitious or more mobile workers, it may have had an adverse effect on rural trade unions. In the twentieth century mechanisation based on the internal combustion engine was slow to spread. Although the first tractors, Fordsons, appeared in 1917, there were still less than 2,000 in the county as late as 1942, even after wartime government pressure for their adoption. **19.**

The breeding and training of working horses, mainly for industrial and commercial haulage, was also important to the Shropshire rural economy. In 1891, the national population of town horses was estimated at one million. The phasing out of horse power after the Great War was an additional factor in depressing agriculture in the 1920s. Army surplus lorries were now used for motive power in towns, as well as the countryside, so there was a poor market for the heavy horses carefully raised in the southern valleys and wintered inside. The coalfields saw a declining demand for the ponies herded wild on the Long Mynd. After the war, according to Thompson : ' the pure horse farm was extremely rare ... actual production within them took place in small lots as sidelines to general farming.' This was accompanied by a decline in the hay and oats demanded by horse farms which Shropshire farmers had found easy to grow. All this had a depressing effect on local agriculture which was to discourage agricultural trades unionism as a whole. **20.**

Some agriculturalists, particularly in marginal areas, like Captain Wolryche - Woolmore on the Dudmaston estate, sought income from afforestation. Building on ancient forest traditions, for example around Clun, some landowners, like the Earl of Powis, took a long term view, and saw a future in extensive commercial forestry with conifers offering a way of speeding up the return on investment. Rider Haggard in his **Rural England,** reported on the profitability of this enterprise : ' Waste heather land set in 1859 with about 4,000 trees per acre, at a cost of 30s. per 1,000, when cleared recently realised a profit of £40 per acre - that is £1 an acre rent for land which was otherwise almost valueless.' **21.**

However, it needed someone with capital and faith in the future to make this work properly. The timber shortages of the Great War and the intrusion of government strategic planning provided this in the shape of the Forestry Commission. From 1920, the Commission intensified this trend, taking advantage of the rain shadow effect of the Welsh hills on the comparatively drier south - west Shropshire. By the 1950s almost 8,500 acres had been planted, covering nearly all the higher gradients, which before had been agriculturally unproductive. **22.** Although demanding new skills and new working structures, the industry has provided regular work and sustainable incomes, based on outside wage rates, for many Shropshire farmworkers and their descendants. It also had the effect of strengthening agricultural trades unionism, as the NUAW consciously tried to organise forestry workers, particularly after our period during the Second World War. **23.**

Demography

Even by the standards of English rural counties Shropshire had a very low population density. Despite the eastern coalfield, still at its height of population, a substantial county town and prosperous market towns, in 1871 66% of Shropshire's population was found in rural areas. In these districts the population increase was only 44% between 1801 and 1931. Between 1871 and 1921 there was an absolute population decline, with farm workers bearing the brunt. Rider Haggard in his classic survey, found that between 1871 and 1901, in the Clun district : ' out of these nineteen parishes only five seem to have increased in population. . . In some villages this shrinkage is very marked ; thus Norbury now returns 159 inhabitants, as against 421 in 1871; and Ratlinghope 197, as against 295.' In 1931 the average population density in parts of south west Shropshire was below 50 per square mile, with nowhere in the county achieving an average of more than 100 per square mile, at a time when the average density in England and Wales was 628. **24.** It can be safely concluded that recruiting and retaining membership for agricultural trades unions in such a sparsely populated area was comparatively difficult. However, as will be discussed later, in the more

densely populated rural parts of the county, there seems to be little correlation between demography and the density of union branches.

The main problem for Shropshire agriculture identified by Rider Haggard was rural depopulation and consequent shortage of labour : ' that the county may be called pastoral and therefore more or less flourishing . . . The smaller occupations were much in demand ; but larger farms, which require more capital, let less readily.' Farmer after farmer he interviewed in the south west of the county, relied on family help or one or two outside labourers. Even a farmer of 262 acres, still in the 1990s a large farm by Shropshire standards, employed no more than two men. The evident lack of mass workplace class solidarity and the communication difficulties in these remote areas meant that organising agricultural workers was an uphill task. **25.**

Although the major fall in rural population took place before 1900, the opportunities presented by the Great War, both by enlistment and by the more diverse employment available to those who remained at home, triggered off a new drift from the land. Even in the remote areas of the county the trickle down effect of government war contracts was felt. Richard Kilvert, a farmer and NFU activist, wrote in 1917 to the Shropshire War Agricultural Committee : ' drawing attention to the wages paid for tree felling in the neighbourhood of Bucknell and also near Craven Arms, causing great unrest amongst farm labourers in the districts.' A copy was sent to the Food Production Department with the message ' the committee wish to protest very strongly against the policy of the government in this connection.' From the north - west of the county there were similar complaints about ' Agricultural labourers ...being drawn from farms to work on aerodromes...causing instances of unrest '. The response of the government reflected the much more important role of the urban trade union movement in keeping war production going : ' Wages paid to labourers on aerodromes etc., were in accordance with the standard trade union rates and the difference between such rates and the wages paid to agricultural labourers, though unfortunate, could not be helped.' **26.**

For some farmworkers, like Arthur Hollins' Jack, their job satisfaction, discussed below, meant that they did not make the short journey to work on Tern Hill Aerodrome, or the more distant Black Country :

> Life to Jack was incomprehensible without deep soil to till or horses and livestock to tend. By staying at Fordhall he was expressing a strong preference for rural life, because the war provided him with opportunites to escape which he declined. He was too old for military service but could have earned much higher wages, if, like

some of his cronies at the pub, he'd gone to work in one of the giant Midlands munitions or ordanance factories. **27.**

Although impossible to quantify, the absolute population decline indicates that many Shropshire farmworkers made the transition to the city, just as other families had done for three generations before. It might be argued, although hard evidence is lacking, that those who made this drastic move were those with the energy and imagination to become involved in trades unionism. An alternative viewpoint is that emigrants who had the individual will to improve their lot would be less interested in collective solutions. However we must presume that emigrants included some portion of union members and activists, who, tired of the seemingly impossible job of organising their fellow workers, sought better paid jobs in the city. Sometimes these rural emigrants became involved with the urban labour movement, like John Beard and John Simpson of the WU. The problem of the ' steady drifting from the country to the towns ', continued to worry Shropshire rural society. Although the nineteenth century emigration probably aided trades unionism, by disposing of workers for whom jobs were not available, continuing depopulation in the twentieth century agricultural depression seems not to have put a premium on remaining agricultural workers, and was likely to have had a negative impact on union membership. **28.**

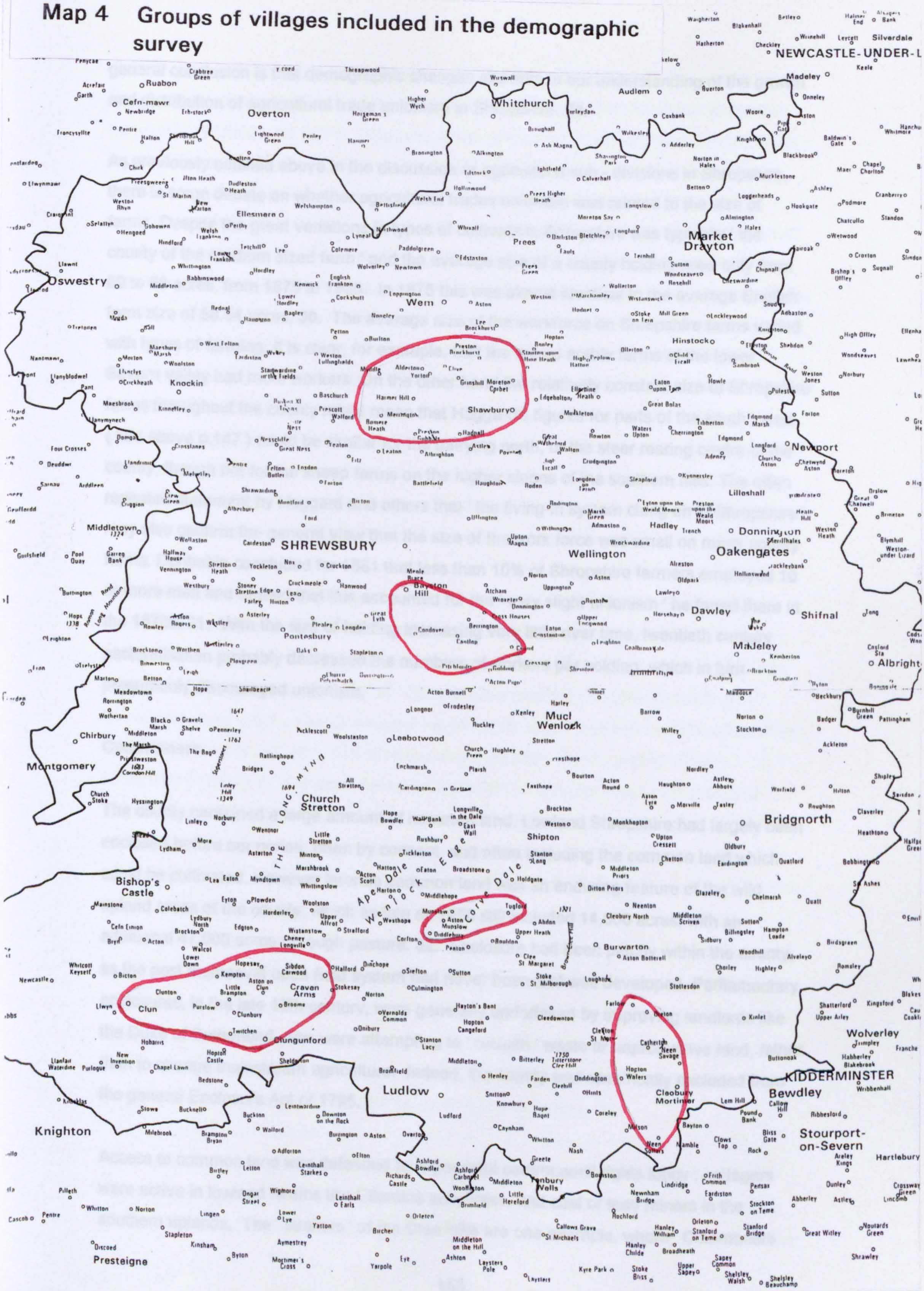
In order to examine the possibility that demographic change may have had some effect on agricultural trade unionism, a survey of population figures using **Kelly's Directories** was made. The survey covered three groups of parishes where agricultural trade unionism was strong - the ' sandstone ' villages north of Shrewsbury, villages south - east of Shrewsbury and the valleys of south - west Shropshire. (see Map 4) As a contrast, two groups of parishes where agricultural trade unionism was weak were also surveyed, namely the Cleobury Mortimer area in the far south - east and a group of parishes in Corvedale, an area where only one union branch has been located for the whole of the period. The findings are as follows :

		1881	1901	1911	1921	1931
Sandstone	Bomere Heath (inc. Heaton)	403	298	361	293	293
Villages	Harmer Hill Hadnall	492	564	588	602	529
North of	Myddle	676	675	744	685	735
Shrewsbury	Preston Brocklehurst	967	819	812	819	833
	Shawbury		830	815	903	903

	Yorton / Broughton	204	165	159	154	152
South	Bayston Hill	549	534	660	603	752
East of	Cantlop / Berrington	989	928	1083	629	805
Shrewsbury	Condover	1775	1658	1765	1694	1844
	Cound	477	479	560	544	470
	Pitchford	214	192	183	174	183
South - West	Broome (Hopesay / Aston)	631	617	613	618	581
Shropshire	Bucknall	521	557	573	537	461
	Clun	2247	1915	1873	1774	1387
	Clungunford	581	556	485	475	446
	Craven Arms (Stokesay)	744	1000	1142	1096	1112
	Tibberton	675	451	157	140	145
Corvedale	Cleobury Mortimer	1581	1810	1531	1487	1293
	Hopton Wafers	433	447	423	424	377
	Neen Sallors	190	206	205	194	175
	Overton (Farlow)	575	555	569	537	514
	Diddlebury	763	709	690	727	704
South - East	Munslow	900	477	485	456	447
Shropshire	Twyford	100	112	105	102	91

These seem to be inconclusive but a number of general points can be made. There is little demographic difference between parishes where trades unionism was important and where it was weak. Village populations as a whole were surprisingly stable, although a marked decline in some of the ' sandstone ' villages between 1921 and 1931 may indicate farmworkers leaving the land as the agricultural depression intensified. Also the decline in the hillier south - west was greater than the average. Some villages showed an odd increase between 1901 and 1911, and then a decline by 1921, possibly due to wartime conditions. The increase in the villages in the south east fringe of Shrewsbury was very marked, but relates to the suburbanisation of the county town rather than to the state of agriculture. The

Map 4 Groups of villages included in the demographic survey



general conclusion is that demographic changes add little to our understanding of the growth and distribution of agricultural trade unionism in Shropshire. **29.**

As previously outlined above in the discussion of agricultural sub - divisions in Shropshire, there is some debate on whether agricultural trades unionism was related to the size of farms. Despite the great variations in types of cultivation, Shropshire was typically ' the county of the medium sized farm ' and the average size of a county holding grew only from 60 to 66 acres, from 1875 to 1935. In 1875 this was almost identical to the average English farm size of 58.54 acres. **30.** The average size of the workforce on Shropshire farms varied with types of farming. It is clear, for example, that the mixed arable farms of the lower Severn valley had more workers. On the other hand the relatively constant size of Shropshire farms throughout the county might mean that Haggard's figures for parts of the south - west (see above p.147) could be similar for the dairying north, or the steer rearing centre of the county, though not for the sheep farms on the higher slopes of the southern hills. The often repeated statement by Haggard and others that ' the living-in system clung on in Shropshire ' may also confirm the general view that the size of the work force was small on many county farms. Dunbabin concluded for 1861 that less than 10% of Shropshire farmers employed 10 or more men and argued that this accounted for the ' very slight unionism ' he found there in the 1870s. **31.** With the size of holding increasing very little over time, twentieth century pastoralisation probably decreased the numbers of workers per holding, which in turn presumably discouraged unionism.

Commoners

The county contained a large amount of common land. Lowland Shropshire had largely been enclosed before our period, often by consent, and often including the common land which could be cultivated. However infertile common land was an enduring feature of the wild upland areas of the county, which as late as 1958 still included 14,000 acres, with an additional 47,000 acres of rough pasture. **32.** Enclosure had been patchy within the county, as the post mediaeval open field system had never been that well developed. Parliamentary enclosures, in the late 18th century, were generally undertaken by improving landlords like the Duke of Sutherland, who were attempting to ' reclaim ' waste or unproductive land, rather than to change mainstream agriculture. Indeed, the county was specifically excluded from the general Enclosure Act of 1795.

Access to common land was defended by a powerful commoners' rights lobby ; cottagers were active in lowland heaths like Ellerdine and Prees, and coal or lead miners in the southern uplands. The ' strakers ' of the Clee Hills are one example, where ' Commoners

rights on Brown Clee have been in existence for more than 1,000 years.' The neighbouring parish of Clee St Margaret was never enclosed because of squatter resistance. Bateman's survey of 1883 identified 7,281 ' cottagers ' in the county, but these only owned 4,544 acres between them. **33.** Only on the Long Mynd, in the Shelve country and on the Clees were smallholdings of any significance. Sometimes they had been encouraged by mineral exploiting landlords like the Earl of Tankerville, who allowed 93 miners access to 250 acres of common land near his Shelve workings. **34.** The lack of trades unionism in these extractive districts suggests that landlord paternalism was perhaps successful in encouraging loyalty, combined with rugged individualism. These squatter holdings were often of no great size since they were primarily a means of processing livestock grazed on common land. Even in the nineteenth century there was an element of ' lifestyle ' agriculture for miners who earned their main living underground. However smallholdings became less viable as lead and coal mining, and other extractive industries declined. The Stiperstone lead mines, which had once provided a tenth of UK output, were worked out by 1911 and even the Clee Hill coal mines had closed by 1936. During the Great War, perhaps with reason, the military authorities assumed that smallholders only farmed to avoid conscription. **35.**

Mick Reed has argued that Sussex commoners together with artisans, formed a rural ' peasantry ' which was the main radical opposition in the nineteenth century to the gentry and large farmers, over issues like the establishment of the New Poor Law and which also survived into the twentieth century. **36.** There is evidence that Primitive Methodism in Shropshire made great progress amongst smallholders rather than with agricultural workers. ' This simple and direct faith must have struck sympathetic chords among earlier ' commin ' dwellers, up and down the countryside, who feeling the loss of their material freedom under the yoke of the landlords... turned readily to the primitive cause.' Only in the Clee Hills, which had a weak branch of the Quarrymens' Union and several rural co - operative stores, did the ' radical peasantry ' postulated by Reed seem to have existed. Elsewhere, aside from the leaning towards Methodism, an individualistic rather than a collectivist culture was engendered by squatters : ' Some of the smallholders who had been thrifty ... moved down from the hills to better land, perhaps take a bigger farm.' This was also the view of the experienced Labour organiser in Norfolk, S.J.Gee : ' There is a large class of smallholders which union propaganda on the whole tends to alienate.' In Shropshire, even in the Clee Hills, the Ludlow bye - election of 1923 (see pp.84 - 85 and 116 - 118) demonstrated the general indifference of squatters to socialism. **37.**

However even the southern uplands did not contain a uniform squatter agriculture. Commoners' rights were apparently weak in the very sparsely populated area of the Clun Forest. Here 20,000 acres were enclosed between 1845 and 1891 and the Forest was soon

farmed in regular tenanted units with owned or rented sheepwalks. **38.** On the Long Mynd, the active Church Stretton Commoners' Association clashed with the local grouse shooting interests. The latter were fostered by the the Urban District Council, keen to promote this spa town as a retirement spot for Indian army officers. As late as 1923 the commoners ' issued posters threatening to go as a body and tear down chestnut palings the council had put up.' A ' licensed ' protest took place, with photographs in the local press, ' adding to the gaiety of the winter season.' This sort of action could hardly be described as radical. **39.**

Attempts to create smallholdings were, in terms of overall acreage, largely irrelevant to mainstream county agriculture. Those associated with the first attempts at agricultural trades unionism in the 1870s had failed (see p.35) and the Smallholdings Act of 1907 was only reluctantly applied by the Conservative County Council - only 2,064 acres had been provided in 93 smallholdings by 1913. Towards the end of the war there was a move, supported by ex - service organisations, for land settlement to become part of the process of reconstruction. As a result, the 1150 acre Lilleshall estate of the Duke of Sutherland was bought by the Board of Agriculture, ' the whole to be converted into a form of colony for soldiers and sailors.' Although the post war sentiment of ' land fit for heroes ', increased smallholding acreage by 3,500, the total was less than 0.25% of agricultural land within the county. **40.**

The NUAW and the WU initially had opposing views on smallholdings. The latter with its urban roots was uninterested, seeing them as potentially creating a class of rich peasants who would be irrelevant or in opposition to its goals. This same argument continued within the NUAW. George Edwards, with his liberal land reform background, continued to support them as a way of fostering a sturdy radical opposition to rural Toryism. Smallholders were encouraged to join the union and the term was incorporated in its title for the first four years of its existence. (See p.iv) However, there is little evidence that smallholders joined in large numbers. The exception to this was when victimised activists were set up in smallholdings, often provided in the early days of the union by subscriptions from Liberal grandees. Examples of union activists settled in this way include Herbert Harvey in Norfolk and organiser James Lunnon who had a smallholding in Hertfordshire. It is possible that NUAW Shropshire county chairman Tom Forrester, who had remarkably militant socialist views for a smallholder, came into this category. **41.**

Other aspects of the rural cottage economy seem to have been as important to wage labourers and their families as to squatters and smallholders. An example of this is whinberry picking, which was an important supplement to income throughout the upland areas of south Shropshire : ' Whinberry picking was such an important part of the annual

finance of Clun that school finished early and many families even obtained credit from tradesmen on the strength of the coming whinberry crop ' and ' That was how the women supported the men's wages. I used to change cheques for farm labourers in the shop for 18 or 19 shillings a week.' In the Strettons picking and selling berries was a useful source of income for poorer families. In 1885 it was estimated that between £600 and £800 a year was made by selling the whinberries at 4s. 6d. a quart. The fruit was not eaten, but used in the Lancashire dyeing industry and the trade had an upturn during the Great War when it was used for blue naval uniforms. Ida Gandy described the way in which even post war, whole families went whinberrying. **42.**

Such activities and others such as cultivating a garden or keeping an animal or two on common land, by giving the illusion of economic independence, inclined cottagers, be they squatters or farm labourers, to be culturally conservative. One farmer at least relates this to the unions : ' There was a lot of pride in those farm cottagers, farmworkers and still is ...that's why they can't get anyone to join the farmworkers' union, they'd rather be on better terms with their boss.' **43.**

Estates and industries

At the other end of the scale Shropshire was home to many estates, with a higher proportion of land in country estates than neighbouring counties. In 1874, 51% of the area was owned by those with over 3,000 acres, compared with 40% in England and Wales as a whole. **44.** In the 1870s and 80s, 8 peers owned over 10,000 acres each, amounting to nearly 1/4 of the agricultural land of the county. These men were, according to the **Victoria County History**, a ' stabilising factor ', their ' agents were influential men in the county, even if the owners were absent.' **45.** Typical was R.H.Newill of Lydbury North, agent to the Earl of Powis' 21,000 acres, Rider Haggard's main Shropshire informant, and who was, in 1916, the target of the NUAW's first strike in the county. (See pp.48 and 174)

Below these grandees, the Royal Commission of Agriculture survey of 1881 identified another group of 18 men with over 5,000 acres each, and another 230 people owning over 500 acres. **46.** The 243 ' principal seats ' listed in **Kelly's Directory** of 1900, matches almost exactly this group of middle sized estate owners, who were found in a similar proportion to other English counties. **47.** These seats were, according to Mark Girouard, ' not originally ...just large houses in the country in which rich people lived. Essentially they were power houses of a ruling class...people did not live in country houses unless they either possessed power, or by setting up in a country house, were making a bid to possess it.' These people formed the backbone of Shropshire landed society at the beginning of our period, and ran the

military, social, cultural, judicial and administrative affairs of the county. **48.** Their estates were distributed fairly uniformly throughout Shropshire, with the exception of the whole length of the western borderland from Oswestry, to the Long Mountain, through to the Clun Forest and the hills of Shelve and the Long Mynd. Here the bleak uplands discouraged polite society.

In nineteenth century Shropshire the middling sized estates were vulnerable to extravagance, At Halston, the infamous Jack Mytton, foxhunter, gambler and joker, drank himself to death aged 38 having ' destroyed a time honoured family and a noble estate, the inheritance of five hundred years.' **49.** Other families, like the Mores of Linley were susceptible to variations in mineral royalties and the costs of political ambitions. Such estates found a ready market among bankers, lawyers, slave traders, government place holders and increasingly West Midland industrialists, who were unconcerned about the distance from London, or who found suitable provincial society in Ludlow or Shrewsbury. The trend to sell to outsiders increased in the Edwardian period, as the largest landowners like the Earl of Powis, ' nervous of Lloyd George ', attempted to dispose of 5,800 acres of the outlying portions of his estates. However it took him five years to find a buyer and the contents of Walcot Hall were not sold until 1929. **50.** Farming remained an abiding interest for the gentry ; even their parklands, such as that laid out at Attingham Hall by Humphrey Repton, were used for grazing improved livestock. In the nineteenth centry support for local agricultural societies had fostered ' scientific' methods, although this was less important in our period.

In many parts of the country the proximity of industry had the effect of raising wages in adjoining rural districts. The industrial parts of the county, what many observers saw as the Shropshire ' Black Country ', occupied quite a small area. In the words of the **Victoria County History** : ' The growth of industry had ltle direct effect on farming in Shropshire, the limited extent of urban development having only a small influence on land use.' Some east Shropshire ironmasters did invest in agriculture to secure food for their workforce and heavy horses for their transport needs. As early as 1795, a Mr. Roden of Benthal was reclaiming slag heaps for agricultural land. **51.** However the ironmasters tended to live near their works and included a high proportion of nonconformists and Quakers amongst the masters, who had little in common, economically, socially or politically with the Tory sporting gentry who surrounded them, and had little interest in acquiring country estates in the vicinity of the coalfield, or in marrying into declining gentry families. There are exceptions to this. The Wolryche - Whitmores kept their ancient Dudmaston estate by marrying into a branch of the Darbys. But as the decay of the Ironbridge area accelerated, industrialists moved elsewhere, usually outside the county, with what remained of their investments. **52.**

Some industrialists became Shropshire gentry, like the Allcrofts of Stokesay Court (see pp.170 - 171) and the Fosters who bought the 10,000 acres of the Apley Park estate near Bridgnorth for £500,000 in 1866, and enthusiastically hunted foxes. But they tended to come from other parts of the West Midlands, Worcester in the case of the Allcrofts and Stourbridge in the case of the Fosters. As was discussed in the last chapter, the early decline of industry in the Ironbridge Gorge, created a tendency for weak industrial trade unions. This in turn had little effect on either rural wage levels in the locality or on the density of agricultural trades unionism in the farming districts surrounding the Ironbridge Gorge. **53.**

There were some examples of Shropshire landowners exploiting industrial resources found on their estates. The Earl of Plymouth, Lords Windsor, Craven and the Rouse Broughton family all shared in the development of the Clee Hill coal mines and stone quarries in the 1860s, benefiting from the 4d.a ton paid to the landowners. However Lady Rouse Broughton insisted that the view from her house should remain unaltered by spoil heaps on the sky line. Her position seems to summarise the attitude of Shropshire landed society towards the industry on its periphery - although not adverse to receiving some of its benefits, it would rather it was not close to home. Trades unionism in these extractive industries was as weak as that of the Ironbridge Gorge and again had no discernible influence on the growth and distribution of agricultural trades unionism. **54.** (See pp.114 - 115)

In Shropshire, as elsewhere, the Great War and its immediate aftermath caused a drastic decline in the fortunes of the gentry. Faced with static rents and high wartime taxation (particularly 40% death duties, as sons and heirs were killed at the front), many landowners were unable to keep up their estates and it is said that almost 10% of the county was up for sale between 1916 and 1920. By and large, the buyers were the tenant farmers of the estates who had done comparatively well out of the war, aided by government subsidies and high produce prices. **55.** During this period, 16% of Shropshire farms, with 18% of acreage, was owner - occupied and this continued to rise to 34% of farms and 30% of acreage by 1941. The number of ' principal seats ', fell from 243 in 1900 to 178 in 1929, in a fairly uniform pattern throughout the county. (see Map 5) Although the social and economic influence of the great house declined in a similar way to the national trend, as we shall see in the next chapter, its occupants only gradually ceased to take an active part in the administration of the county. **56.**

It has not been possible to establish a meaningful correlation from the relationship between the distribution of estates and union activity. (Cf Maps 1 and 5) This is partly because the estates were already in decline when the unions' membership was peaking. Some of the strongest NUAW branches, e.g. Lydbury North and Ackleton, were formed in the shadow of

Map 5 The location of landed estates in Shropshire

1900

1929

the big house. On the other hand, some strong union areas - the northern ' sandstone ' villages or the Bayston Hill district for the NUAW and the WU's strongholds in the eastern coalfield were far from the influence of the gentry. Such was the widespread support for agricultural trades unionism in the post war period that its geographical spread inevitably overlapped with the influence of the large estates. The only direct correlation is the unsurprising absence of both estates and union branches from the inhospitable parts of the southern uplands.

Farmworkers

The place of the farmworker in the classic rural triptych of gentry, farmer and labourer, has been the subject of much academic debate. Howkins, in a powerful and convincing chapter, argues that class in the form of a ' structural conflict ' was endemic to the capitalist organisation of farming in Norfolk and was geared in particular to the seasons which dictated whether farmers or (briefly) farmworkers held the upper hand. However, even Howkins, a proponent of the infinite variability of English agricultural systems, would not argue that this model was easily applicable outside the larger corn growing farms, with factory sized workforces, in East Anglia. We can conclude that the more pastoral agriculture of Shropshire with its smaller and more intimate units, whilst certainly not divorced from ' structural conflict ', may have had less opportunity for its development. **57.**

The research of other historians, even in East Anglia, has informed the debate on class conflict in surprising ways. Brown, in his characteristically modest work on Essex has suggested a whole number of factors which made for a strong or weak union branch. For a strong branch this includes a higher proportion of larger farms, the geographical isolation of a community, the presence of sympathetic artisans or shopkeepers, the establishment of a nonconformist chapel and a tradition of popular protest. By contrast Brown finds weak branches in what he calls ' controlled ' villages, with a high degree of domination by the gentry. Given the variablity of Shropshire agriculture, this author, for the reasons outlined above, has found it difficult to be so definitive. This is not to say that Brown's conclusions are unsound, but that Essex, with its large corn growing farms, had a more uniform agriculture. **58.**

Other historians have also discussed the place of farmworkers in agrarian society. One of the important discoveries of George Ewart Evans, as he developed the technique of oral history, was the pride in workmanship of most farmworkers : ' So great was the interest in ploughing a well - finished stretch with mathematically straight furrows, or in the faultless drilling of a seed - bed and so keen was the rivalry between various horsemen that ... on a Sunday morning

that they walked round the parish inspecting their neighbours' week of ploughing to see if it measured up to the high claims that had been made for it.' **59.** Other rural historians have confirmed this finding, for example Mutch in Lancashire, whose farmworkers shared ' pride in the land and that love of stock which prompted his forefathers to render willing and humble sacrifice to the farmers' and were therefore less likely to join agricultural trades unions. **60.**

There are numerous Shropshire instances of the same phenomenon : ' Many of the jobs could and did produce a real sense of satisfaction and pride of achievement when completed, so that there was a healthy sense of competition among the men from different farms in their own specialities ' and ' The waggoners used to think the world of their horses, you see, they'd be up at 5 o' clock in the morning to feed them, and they'd feed those horses and clean them and put 'em ready, all besides putting their harness on them.' **61.** Some of this evidence must be used with caution, particularly that offered in retrospect which can produce an over nostalgic view : ' I never heard my father grumbling about the long hours - everybody did whatever was asked of them .... they always seemed a very happy gang ...people looked after their machinery and all the same in all walks of life, they prided in what they did.' **62.** Genuine pride in the skill of the job certainly existed, and a feature from the agricultural correspondent of the **Shropshire Chronicle** at the end of the period carries a ring of truth : ' **Shropshire Farmworkers - Men of a Fine Type**....I saw one of them at Mr.Stephen Ward's at seven o' clock in the evening driving a four row beet drill as straight as a dart across a field...the man was as anxious as himself to get the job finished. The land was wonderfully worked and not a weed of any description to be seen.' **63.**

It could be said that such a pride in work would make individuals less likely to join a union, but on the other hand there is an argument that it was the most skilled workers who, valuing their own individual worth, were more likely to want to better their lot through the union. It is perhaps curious the way in which the rural union activist continued to take pride in his work compared to the city factory worker ' alienated from the means of production', but the persistence of the phenomenon amongst skilled workers of all sorts, may make us question the classic Marxist dictum. **64.**

Many rural social historians have also commented on the late survival of hierarchies amongst the workforce in pre - mechanised agriculture. **65.** In particular the important cleavage was between those workers responsible for animals, either as skilled horse ploughmen (known as waggoners in Shropshire) or shepherds - both of whom had a large degree of autonomy in their working lives, and general agricultural labourers together with live - in farm servants. Existing oral evidence suggests that these hierarchies survived in

Shropshire : ' Shepherds didn't change much, they were generally older men established and in a cottage and stopped with the farm.' Similarly the waggoners retained pride in their skills : ' Stepping it out to get it exactly right...there was a lot of interest in that sort of thing. Always put brasses on your horses...tied their tails up and put ribbons on them.' **66.**

The living - in system, whereby younger farm servants (possibly even farmers' children undergoing a form of training) worked and boarded with a farmers' family, seems also to have survived later in the county, especially in the hillier and more isolated west, where farmworkers' cottages were scarcer :

' There were two chaps living in the house, they would be young, had their food in the house. We employed two waggoners and a shepherd with their own cottages.'

' Several of the workmen were given rooms in the farmhouses, their meals, beds and washing were provided and they were also given a room or kitchen to sit in of an evening...These live - in men were usually hired at the local May Fairs.' **67.**

Although there is little information about the exact occupations of members of Shropshire agricultural unions, the general impression from these and other accounts is that they were mainly older men who did not ' live in '. This may well account for the lack of unionism along the south - west Shropshire hills, since it would take a certain degree of courage for younger ' live - in ' men to join whilst under their masters' roofs.

The evidence of the late survival of hiring fairs for yearly servants is mixed, although it seems likely that it continued again in the remote areas. This may have had some relevance to the weakness of unions in those parts of the county where it persisted. At the beginning of the century, the local press reported hiring similarly to that of other agricultural markets. In the 1903 Clun Fair ' some hiring was done, but very high wages were asked by all classes of servants and the contracts made were limited in number.' **68.** There is oral evidence that a regular hiring system acted as an employment exchange in the south west, as the fairs were held consecutively : ' There were two kinds of hiring in those days, the married people lived in a tied cottage or farm cottage, they were hired on Lady Day, March 25th. was their time of moving....The single men who lived in and there was a lot of them employed on the farms then, they were hired at the May fairs. The 11th. May in Clun, and the 6th.in Bishop's Castle, Knighton on the 14th. The men who'd done their 12 months and wanted a change just stood on the street and were interviewed by the prospective employer.' **69.**

The system also operated in the cheese making area around Wem : ' At Whixall the only holiday for farmworkers and dairymaids was New Year's Day. At Gorby Market in that week they could be re - engaged for a further twelve months or dismissed.' Another informant recalls : ' In about 1919 I was taken by my grandmother to see the Gorby Market in High

Street, Wem, when farm servants were given a day off to come into Wem to receive their wages for the previous year. This applied mostly to men and I don't remember seeing any women.' **70.** After the war the leisure aspects of the fairs became more dominant, as one woman wrote of Craven Arms fair in the 1920s ; ' Older people have told me they remember the hiring of farm hands being a regular feature of the May Fair.' **71.**

The minimum wages legally available to farmworkers after the introduction of the Corn Production Act were not automatically paid, either through intention or ignorance on the part of both farmers and workers. Again this seems more common in the remote south - west. The agricultural crisis also increased the number of rootless casual workers who were prepared to toil for next to nothing. According to threshing contractor Charlie Spencer of Craven Arms : ' A number of unemployed men would often follow after the machines - they were nicknamed " moaners " - in the hope of getting a day's employment..they were that pleased to have a job, they'd never worry about leaving off. Oh, they'd come begging and praying for a job, and they'd just get a few shilling a week.' **72.** This clearly undermined the whole basis of rural trades unionism.

Despite these difficulties the unions helped arrange prosecutions of farmers who did not pay the minimum wage and used the publicity generated by the payment of sometimes substantial amounts of back pay as an important tool for recruiting. After the trial of Sarah Pugh, a farmer from Wilston, near Church Stretton, Judge Ivor Brown concluded : ' Since the Corn Production Act came in, the old custom of hiring farm servants for twelve months has entirely disappeared.' However similar prosecutions continued, such as that of a ' yearly man ' at Oswestry, and as late as 1927, there were four cases heard together at Ludlow. Here the chairman of the bench was keen to clarify the workings of the revised minimum wage legislation : ' If the heresy that the Act only referred to members of the union was believed, the sooner it was dispelled the better.' Even in the following year, an underpayment prosecution at Knighton revealed continuing yearly hiring. According to one farmer, the Church Stretton Hiring Fairs only ' stopped before the war.' (1939 - 45). **73.**

It is difficult to assess the effect of the continuance of yearly hiring on union membership. Dunbabin in his work on union distribution in the 1870s, places Shropshire in the area of ' very slight unionism', and justifies this by referring to the relatively high ratio of indoor to outdoor farm servants, and yearly hiring, which he found similar to that of the north of England. However, by the 1920s the union was clearly using the publicity generated through the underpayment of yearly servants as a weapon for recruiting, albeit with unknown success. Some writers have claimed that the hiring was in effect a system of wage bargaining without the union and that it hindered union development. Although the evidence is inconclusive, it

may be that this factor was at work in the hills of the south west of the county and may explain the modest success of the unions there. **74.**

Conclusions

In evaluating the importance of the structure of the Shropshire agrarian economy in explaining the growth and distribution of agricultural trades unionism within the county a number of conclusions can be made. The geographical remoteness of the county and its weak communications contributed to cultural conservatism. Within this county it is difficult to detect any direct correlation between the complex agrarian structure and the relative strength of agricultural trade unions in each locality. The areas of strength of the NUAW and WU identified in Chapter 3, seem with only a few exceptions (for example in the valleys of the south west or in the eastern Ryelands) to bear little relationship to the type of agriculture in those localities. Though it is clear that the mixed farming in the two areas mentioned, with a higher number of workers per holding, did encourage strong union branches like Ackleton and Lydbury North. The unions in the south - west were found in the river valleys, with their richer soils and close railway links, rather than in the adjacent uplands.

Demographic changes seem to have had little discernible impact on agricultural trade unionism, although continued rural depopulation weakened it by providing another option for active farmworkers, who might well have been union supporters. However, it is clear that the standing of the agricultural industry and national agricultural trends had a direct effect on agricultural wages and that this in itself had a directly causal relationship with agricultural trade unionism. It can be postulated that the relative success of Shropshire agriculture, compared with the national picture, to withstand the farming depression, itself due to ongoing pastoralisation, may have contributed to the relative decline of trades unionism.
Smallholdings and common land, whilst often occupying a prominent geographical position in certain districts, in fact contributed marginally to agricultural output in Shropshire.
Aside from a connection with nonconformity, smallholders did not embrace rural radicalism, and indeed in encouraging individuality it is likely that they contributed a cultural conservatism to the entire ' cottage economy ' which included many farmworkers.

Despite a decline in the importance of landed estates, the gentry continued to have a political and cultural impact on the life of the county. (See Chapter 7 **Paternalism**) Surprisingly perhaps, the existence of estates seems to have had no correlation with the strength of agricultural trade unionism in their vicinity. The continuing absence of friction between landlords and tenants in Shropshire contributed to a united front against agricultural trade unionism. With the exception of the brief post war period, when the farming establishment attempted to woo the unions, this undoubtedly had an adverse effect on unionism. The

' Black Country ' area of Shropshire had little impact on its rural hinterlands and as these industrial areas declined, the eastern coalfield and surrounding agricultural areas had increasingly separate concerns.

It is true that ' structural conflict ' as postulated by Howkins, or even plain class conflict, is evident in Shropshire and contributed to the growth of trade unionism, but its impact was probably lessened because of the small workforce per holding in an increasingly pastoral economy. Whilst Shropshire agriculture was relatively progressive, it could not compare with the mechanised, capital intensive agricultural systems, for example in East Anglia, which seem to have intensified class differences. In contrast, ' pride in work ' and occupational hierarchies were important to many Shropshire farmworkers, and whilst this may have contributed to cultural conservatism, equally it was a concept which could be shared by many trade unionists. Living - in and yearly hiring continued to be important for farmworkers well within our period, although it became increasingly confined to hillier areas, where the unions tended to do less well.

It can be concluded that the nature of Shropshire agriculture offers some insights into the explanations for the general growth and decline of agricultural trade unionism within the county. However, although the agrarian complexity of Shropshire is comparatively well identified, into individual ' pays ', it has proved difficult to establish a precise causal relationship between variations in types of agriculture and the strength of agricultural trades unions in particular districts.

1. W. W. Watts **Shropshire - The Geography of the County** (1939) p.59.
2. Ibid p.195.
3. A.E.Jenkins **Titterstone Clee Hills. Everyday Life, Industrial History and Dialect** (1982) p.79 - 80.
4. Dorothy Sylvester **The Rural Landscape of the Welsh Borderland** (1969) p.319.
5. Ibid. p.319
6. Watts op.cit. p.199.
7. Sylvester op.cit. p.58.
8. Watts op.cit. pp.72 - 73.
9. Gilbert Wooding Robinson **A Survey of the Soils and Agriculture of Shropshire** (1911) p. 43.
10. **Victoria County History** (VCH) Volume IV (1989) p.232. It is no accident that the relative strengths of the NUAW in Norfolk and Lincolnshire were and are related to the large

farms and their semi - industrial workforces. See Howkins **Poor Labouring Men** op.cit. p.9 and Mills op.cit. p.1.

11. NUAW Records EC Minutes 28.5.26.

12. VCH Vol.IV (1989) pp.233 and 242. Also see Arthur Hollins **The Farmer, the Plough and the Devil** (1984). One contributor to the Shropshire Women's Institute oral history, **Shropshire Within Living Memory** (SWLM) (1990) p. 94, suggests that from 1933, direct milk sales to Wolverhampton retailers became important in the Yorton district. For the NUAW and processing workers post 1945 see Bob Wynn **Skilled at All Trades - The history of the farmworkers' union 1947 - 1984** (1993), especially Chapter 20. See also Mills op.cit.p.11 for the details of the composition of the NUAW's membership in the early 1960s, as well as a brief discussion of the number of workers per holding issue in the same period.

13. Robinson op.cit. p. 65. See also Chapter 5 p.117.

14. VCH Vol. IV p. 237 and Robinson op.cit. p.64.

15. Paul Stamper **' The Farmer Feeds us All ' - A Short History of Shropshire Agriculture** (1989) p.70. Shropshire Museums Service Oral History Collection (SMSOHC) No. 39 Maurice Alderson, farmer of Bishop's Castle (1894 - 1987) and interview with John Foster, farmer of Bridgnorth (b.1920) 18.7.95 and **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 31.1.30. See also Madden op.cit. pp.140 and 145 and Mills op.cit. p.11.

16. Watts op.cit. p.77.

17. Robinson op.cit. p.65.

18. Malcolm Wanklyn **Border Agriculture and Agrarian Society** (unpublished paper) p.5. For the persistence of manual harvesting and the ingenuity of Shropshire farmers in their use of cheap army surplus lorries instead of tractors see SWLM pp.160 and 163. Trevor Rowley **The Landscape of the Welsh Marches** (1986) p.207.

19. Stamper. op.cit. p.75 and VCH Vol. IV p. 240.

20. F.M.L. Thompson **Nineteenth Century Horse Sense** Economic History Review Vol.19 (1976), SMSOHC No.1 Oscar Morgan, horse farmer of Bitterley and No. 8 Miss Smout, horse farmer's daughter, of Wenlock Edge.

21. Vincent Waite **Shropshire Hill Country** (1970) p.110, National Trust Guidebook **Dudmaston** (1980) p.5 and Henry Rider Haggard. **Rural England** (1902) p.424.

22. Waite op.cit. p. 111.

23. Interview Ivan Monckton, T.G.W.U. Presteigne 3.7.93. See also Wynn op.cit. especially Chapter 19.

24. **Royal Commission on Agriculture** (1881) Volume II p. 262, Watts op.cit. p.105 and VCH Vol. IV p.257

25. Rider Haggard op.cit.pp.422 - 424 and 427 - 429.

26. SRO SC51/1A 1 Shropshire War Agriculture Committe Minutes 27.8.17, 30.7.18 and 7.5.18, and Labour sub - committee 10.9.18.

27. Hollins op.cit. p.25

28. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 2.3.23. For a Norfolk example of an NUAW activist's motives in leaving the land see Mansfield **George Edwards** loc.cit. p.58.

29. I am grateful to Roger Leese of Wolverhampton University for this suggestion. **Kelly's Directories** for 1885, 1905, 1913, 1924, 1934 were used. Some allowance was made in the methodology for parish boundary changes.

30. VCH p. 202 and 257. (The number of Shropshire farmers can be taken to be the 3,841 ' proprietors ' of Bateman's survey of 1883.) Robinson op.cit. p.50 and Alastair Mutch **Rural Life in South West Lancashire 1840 - 1914** (1988) p.17.

31. Robinson op.cit. p.50, Rider Haggard op.cit.p. 425 and J.P.D. Dunbabin loc.cit.p.123.

32. Sylvester. op.cit. p.57.

33. VCH Vol. IV p. 202, B.E.Simmonds **The Brown Clee Liberty and Clee St. Margaret** (1992) p.18 and Trevor Rowley **The Shropshire Landscape** (1972) p.51.

34. Trevor Rowley **The Landscape of the Welsh Marches** (1984) p.223.

35. Ibid. pp.207 and 222. See the account of the appeal of William Gough of Squivlier, Shelve, heard by the County Military Tribunal and reported in the **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 30.3.17.

36. Mick Reed **The Peasantry of Nineteenth - Century England : a Neglected Class** History Workshop Journal 18 Autumn 1984.

37. A.B.Tinsley **With Horse and Cart and Friend - Memories of a Salop farm boy** (1976) pp. 56 - 57, SMSOHC No.74 John Norton of Ludlow, estate agent (b. 1924) and S.J.Gee **The Problem of Rural Constituencies** Labour Organiser October 1923 p.9. For further estimation of the radicalism of Methodism in Shropshire see Chapter 7 **Nonconformity.**

38. Trevor Rowley **The Landscape of the Welsh Marches.** (1986) pp.150 - 151.

39. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 23.1.23.

40. For an account of the smallholding ' movement ' see F.E.Green **The History of the English Agricultural Labourer 1870 - 1920** Part 5 and Armstrong op.cit. p.148, where he points to the national success of the 1908 Act. Stamper op.cit. p.65 and **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 27.7.17.

41. Edwards op.cit. p.114, Groves op.cit.p.106, F.E.Green **The Tyranny of the Countryside** (1913) p.246. For Lunnon see NUAW Records EC Minutes 28.4.17 and for Forrester p.101.

42. R.K. Moore **Memories of Clun : Edwardian Life in a Small Rural Town** (1986), Shropshire Libraries **The Strettons : Scenes From the Past** (1979) p.45, Pentabus **Bucknell Talking** (1982), Ida Gandy **An Idler on the Shropshire Borders** (1970) p.89 and SMSOHC No.11 Mrs K.Gaskell of Church Stretton (b. 1895).

43. SMSOHC No. 39 Maurice Alderson, farmer of Bishop's Castle (1894 - 1987). See also the discussion in John Benson **The Penny Capitalists** (1983).

44. VCH Vol. IV p. 250, see also **Royal Commission on Agriculture** (1881) Vol. II p.260

45. VCH. Vol. IV p. 202 and p. 250.

46. **Royal Commission on Agriculture** (1881) Vol. II p. 260.

47. **Kelly's Directory** 1900 p. xvi - xvii. Bateman's survey quoted in VCH Vol. II p.202 gives 109 ' squires ' and 669 ' yeomen ' in the county.

48. Mark Girouard **Life in the English Country House** (1978) p.2 and F.M.L. Thompson **English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century** (1963) p.124.

49. Waite op. cit. p.104 and George Glover **Shropshire Eccentrics** (1991) pp.65 - 66.

50. VCH Vol. IV p. 252, Wanklyn loc.cit.p.14 and **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 3.5.29.

51. Despite having only ten paid up members in 1924, the NUAW in Glamorgan took advantage of the CPA system and the higher prevailing miners' wage rate to obtain a settlement 80% higher than that prevailing in Norfolk. See Madden op.cit. p.113 and Pretty op.cit. p.174. J. Phillip Dodd **The State of Agriculture in Shropshire 1775 - 1825** Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological Society Volume LX 1954 - 56 p.2. See also Trevor Rowley **The Shropshire Landscape** (1972) p. 222.

52. Ironbridge Gorge Museum Guidebook **Rosehill House and Dale House** (1984) p.3 and National Trust Guidebook **Dudmaston** (1980) p. 31.

53. Wanklyn loc.cit. p.5.

54. Jenkins op.cit. pp. 42 and 46.

55. See Hollins op.cit. Chapter 1, Wanklyn loc cit. p.4 and F.M.L.Thompson **English Landed Society in the Twentieth Century** Transactions of the Royal Historical Society 40 1990 p.13. For a comparable position in East Anglia see Nicholas Mansfield **Land and Labour** pp. 76 - 77, in Gerald Gliddon (edit.) **Norfolk and Suffolk in the Great War** (1988). Arthur Marwick **The Deluge - British Society and the First World War** (1965) pp. 324 - 325 reckons that between the Armistice and the end of 1922, 1/4 of the acreage of England had changed hands. For a discussion of how the Attingham estate was taken over by the National Trust see Simon Jenkins **The Noblest Nationalisation** National Trust Magazine Spring 1995.

56. VCH Vol. IV. p. 255 and **Kelly's Directory** 1900 and 1929 both page 1.

57. Howkins **Poor Labouring Men** op.cit. Chapter 2.

58. Brown op.cit. pp.123 - 127.

59. George Ewart Evans **Where Beards Wag All** (1970) p.64.

60. Mutch op.cit. p.57, quoting the **Ormskirk Advertiser** 9.1.13.

61. Tinsley op.cit. p.62 and SMSOHC No. 82 Mr.J.Williams, Billingsley, Bridgnorth.

62. Janet Preshous **Bishop's Castle Well Remembered** (1992) p.36. Undated memories of Sid Cadwllader.

63. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 30.5.30.

64. For a discussion of whether ' skilled ' farmworkers were more likely to be union members see Wynn op.cit. Chapter 13 and George Scales **Weighing Up** (1988) pp. 86 - 87.

65. See any of the works of George Ewart Evans, Newby op.cit. p.20 and Howkins op.cit. **Poor Labouring Men** p.21.

66. SMSOHC No.36 Maurice Alderson (1894 - 1987), farmer of Bishop's Castle and No. 13. Albert Gough, farmer of Clun.

67. Ibid. No.16 Fred Wycherley, farmer of Beckbury and a description of a farm in the Clun valley c.1930 from SWLM p.72. For some discussion of these issues, particularly relating to the ' hinds' of Northumberland see Howkins **Reshaping** op.cit. pp.50 - 51 and 112.

68. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 15.5.03. For a comparison with the East Riding of Yorkshire see Stephen Chaunce **East Riding Hiring Fairs** Oral History Vol.3 No.2.

69. SMSOHC No.68 Bob Davies, farmer of Clun.

70. SWLM pp.154 - 155.

71. Ibid pp. 240 - 241. See also Preshous op.cit.pp. 94 - 95.

72. SMSOHC No.4. Charlie Spencer, threshing contractor, sawyer and wheelwright of Craven Arms. In contrast to this view there is evidence from East Anglia that the threshing gangs were refuges for many blacklisted union activists see George Ewart Evans **Spoken History** (1987) Chapter 5.

73. Frequent references in the local press indicate that new government legislation was often misunderstood or in the more remote areas genuinely not know about. See for example the case of Enoch and William Lock ' two members of the gypsy fraternity ', summoned under the Military Service Act to Bishop's Castle County Police Court, who ' pleaded they were no scholars and noone had told them anything about the matter ' in **Shropshire Chronicle** 21.7.16. See Ibid 14.10.21, 24.6.21,15.4.27 and 21.9.28. SMSOHC No.40 Mr.H.Cox, farmer of Church Stretton.

74. Dunbabin loc.cit. His view may relate to Hobsbawn and Rude op.cit. pp.168, 202, 304 -5 and 309, who have established that Shropshire was almost unaffected by the Captain Swing disturbances of the 1830s. See Howkins **Poor Labouring Men** op.cit. Chapter 2, Carter op.cit. Chapters 5 and 6 Chaunce loc.cit. and Steve Chaunce **Rediscovering Diversity in Agricultural Modernisation in Britain** unpublished paper given at Centre for East Anglian Studies UEA 25.2.95.

Chapter 7 - Explanations centring on rural culture and ideology, the survival of paternalism and the tenacity of ' local patriotism '

This chapter will examine cultural explanations for the development of agricultural trades unionism. It will try to define a Shropshire identity, and examine the workings and reality of paternalism on the part of gentry, farmers and clergy. Certain institutions like friendly societies and fox hunts will provide case studies for cultural attitudes. The political side of paternalism will be discussed to reveal long standing ' loyalist ' views and allegiance to the Conservative party. Possible ideologies competing with ' loyalism' amongst farmworkers like methodism and rural radicalism will be shown to be weak in the county. The growth of new village institutions in the post 1918 period will be shown as reinforcing the prevailing hegenomy of ' Shropshire patriotism '. It will be argued that ' Shropshire patriotism ' was the most important factor in shaping agricultural trades unionism between 1900 and 1930.

Ancient loyalties

In January 1927 Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin wrote a letter to Shropshire novelist Mary Webb : ' I tell you with what keen delight I have read **Precious Bane**. My people lived in Shropshire for centuries before they migrated to Worcestershire and I spent my earliest years in Bewdley which is on the border. In your book I seem to hear again the speech and turns of phrase which surrounded me in the nursery.' Moreover Baldwin was probably thinking of Shropshire when he described his own vision of English identity : ' the sound of scythe against the whetstone, and the sight of a plough team coming over the brow of a hill, the sight that had been in England since England was England, and may be seen in England long after the Empire has perished, and every works in England has ceased to function.' **1.**

As Howkins has explained in his essay **The Discovery of Rural England** the notion of ' rural England ' as the repository of all that was good in the nation was a comparatively late creation and based primarily on the disappearing landscape of the ' south country '.
' Shropshire could be incorporated into ' the south country ' ... since parts of Shropshire conformed to the ideal types...For instance half timbering, village greens and hedgerows are all part of the Shropshire landscape.' **2.** Howkins implies that this rural identity is a created myth, although for social anthropologists like Anthony Cohen the sense of indentity is more important for self definition than any social or political structures. **3.** However for Shropshire the sense of indentity was in place long before the late Victorian and Edwardian period that Howkins postulates.

Late Victorian antiquarian Thomas Auden wrote that it : ' has maintained a character of its own all through as is easily recognised by any one who have lived both in Shropshire and in other parts of the Midlands or the north. Local life and local feeling have been, and are still strong in Shropshire. This has arisen partly from its distance from the metropolis...Shropshire has been brought into closer contact with the outer world, first by the rise of coaches, and then by that of the railway, but it has maintained its individuality more than most counties. **4.**

In part, this Shropshire sense of indentity was defined in relation to Wales. It is possible to trace this back to the Dark Ages which saw ' Offa's Dyke less a frontier than a crossing point, allowing raid and counter - raid on either side of the border, and encouraging a symbiotic relationship between English and Welsh warlords, complementary and antagonistic at the same time. ' **5.** Historians such as Linda Colley see the area as important to the ' forging ' of the nation : ' centuries of cross - border trade, migration and marriage had forged a distinctive but mongrel culture, ' The manners of the people' , noted one early nineteenth century antiquarian of this region, ' are half English and half Welsh.' **6.** With the Council of the Marches effective until 1689, ' The delegation of some of the royal powers effectively gave the crown a wider reach.' Shropshire people were therefore inclined to support both local landowners and the crown as a protection from the Welsh. In the English Civil Wars, the local gentry by and large supported the king and a village like Myddle endorsed these sentiments by sending twenty of its young men to King Charles's army. In his detailed work on the sources of American colonisation, David Hackett Fischer places Shropshire in that ' loyalist England ', which supplied Virginian gentry and southern planters. **7.** At the risk of promoting spurious ' ancient ' history it is worthwhile remembering that such powerful border loyalties do linger. The author interviewing an elderly union branch secretary was firmly told that the informant was Welsh, even though his birthplace was less than a mile from the border, and he had worked in Shropshire for 66 years. **8.**

It was the cross border concept which was central to much of Mary Webb's writing. She told an admirer : ' the population she drew upon was Welsh in almost everything but language - and the language she held, died hard in some of the outlying districts - a submerged part of Wales - a kind of Cantref - y Gwaelod lost to its own people in the rising tide of the Anglo invasion.' **9.** It is difficult to be definitive about the extent of cross border emigration. The early rural sociologist Gomme claimed that until after the Municipal Reform act of 1835, the Shrewsbury suburb of Frankwell was largely Welsh speaking, as the Welsh were forbidden to practise trades supervised by the trading companies and guilds. More recent work on migration has found that the Welsh community in Shrewsbury was substantial ; the 1871 census showing 783 households with at least one Welsh member and 1378 of the population being Welsh born. **10.**

Whatever the reality, many Shropshire people into this century felt threatened by Welsh immigration, perhaps in the same way as their forefathers did. An indication of the interpenetration of the border is given by Welsh historian John Osmond who places the neighbouring counties of Montgomery and Radnorshire firmly in the ' British Wales ' camp of his ' Three Wales ' model. **11.** Although written evidence of this anti - Welsh feeling is rare, it is a thread in the interviews of rural people made in the 1970s by the Shropshire Museums Service :

' Shropshire border people were always very wary of Welsh people you know...We didn't trust them somehow, I don't know why. There was something underhand about them. I'm only saying what the general feeling in Shropshire was.' (Farmworker)

' Welsh will always look after themselves.' (Farmer)

' Most of the farms sold were bought by farming people. Many of these I think had probably moved eastwards from Wales...They had taken good care of their money and saved up enough to buy a better farm and moved eastward. The ideal was to get good farming country like that found in Corvedale.' (Estate agent)

The Welsh surname of the first informant illustrates the confusing picture over time, and there is a suggestion that the Welsh element in the population was the part opposed to the prevailing loyalism associated with the county. Whilst it is difficult to press this point, certainly a high proportion, roughly one - third of the union activists located during this research had Welsh surnames. (It is probably no more than speculation to suggest that the racial purity themes espoused by the **Shrewsbury Chronicle** in the 1920s may also relate to this anti - Welshness. **13.**)

As we have already seen (p.20), in the nineteenth century the threat from the west was matched by an eastern threat from the growth of the Birmingham conurbation which seemed to reach almost to the eastern coalfield of Shropshire. The growth of agricultural trades unionism in the 1870s was attributed to the subversion of ' loyal ' workers by outside ' foreign ' agitators inspired by the urban radicals like Joe Chamberlain and Jesse Collings. As the rate of urbanisation slowed up, Shropshire felt reasonably secure from this threat, but post 1945 the creation of Telford New Town created new tensions ; ' The west Midlands rearing its ugly head, there was a fair bit of opposition ! ' **14.**

The work of Mary Webb further defined this identity : ' Shropshire is a county where the dignity and beauty of ancient things lingers long, and I have been fortunate not only in being born and brought up in its magical atmosphere, and in having many friends in farm and cottage, who by pleasant talk and reminiscence have fired the imagination, but also in having a mind as was my father's - a mind stored with old tales and legend that did not come from

books, and rich with an abiding love for the beauty of forest and harvest field.' **15.** Webb's popularity grew after her death, and in the following years, four biographies were published , some as topographical guides to the ' border ' sites of her novels. This was aided by regular travel features on local antiquities in the **Shropshire Chronicle** and cheap rural bus networks. Even in the 1990s ' Mary Webb country ' is promoted by tourism authorities, and the literary world : ' Mary Webb is the Shropshire novelist. She loved and knew the county intimately and in her novels and poems, created from what she saw, perceived and believed that timeless landscape within which her characters expend their highly charged emotions and act out their equally timeless dramas.' **16.**

It is a truism to say that Shropshire was a remote part of England. This remoteness affected rural working class culture, as well as social and economic conditions, to make it an area where folk customs lingered on. The usual sort of country fairs were given a wilder flavour by the border location. In the 1880s, a curate described the Clun May Fair as ' a chorus of demons on holiday from the lower regions.' Even in the 1980s, the main annual sheep sale at Craven Arms was the scene of heavy drinking and ' traditional ' fights between mid - Wales farmers' sons and local youths. **17.** Charlotte Burne, the late Victorian folklorist, who undertook field work in the 1880s, recorded numerous contemporary examples of witchcraft and home made remedies. As late as 1905, a Clee Hill gardener believed he had been ' overlooked ' by a witch. **The Dictionary of British Folk Customs** has numerous entries for Shropshire, including ' church clipping ' , ' Easter lifting ' , ' first footing ', ' souling ', ' Oak Apple Day ' and ' Easter skipping '. A history of border morris dancing has found an active local tradition (' going niggering - principally to collect beer money '), lasting until the Second World War, and going on unnoticed by the English Folk Dance and Song Society, which in attempts to revive folk dancing in the 1920s claimed ' Shropshire has lagged behind in the growing movement.' **18.**

Historians such as Bushaway, have interpreted folk customs as working class resistance to the tamer culture and to the more regular hours, demanded by employers in the nineteenth century. In Shropshire, he sees customs such as the ' palming ' at Pontesford Hill and the wild fights for the occupation of the summit of the Wrekin on May Day as assertions of working class ' rights '. Although the latter event was ' to drink a health to ' all friends around the Wrekin ' ...Various scenes of drunkness (sic) and licentiousness were frequently exhibited, its celebration has, of late been properly discouraged by the magistracy, and is going deservedly to decay.' Bushaway also sees ' licensed ' class conflict in the ' Easter lifting ' of prominent parish figures - the parson, squire or large farmers - by village women, who were rewarded with small sums of money to cease this ritualised violence, which survived into the twentieth century.

Bushaway is less convincing in his interpretation of the widespread Oak Apple Day celebrations, when he links it, in villages like Ashford Carbonel (near Ludlow), to late Victorian opposition to a landlord encroaching on common land. **19.** Whilst this struggle was undoubtedly real, he ignores the monarchist purpose of the occasion, which was to commemorate the Restoration of Charles II. This had a particular local frisson, since the oak tree in which the king was supposedly concealed after the battle of Worcester, was at Boscobel, right on the edge of Shropshire. The festival, almost a cult, was promoted by the Restoration government and although it may have overlain earlier woodland customs, its political message was clearly appreciated by its participants. We may conclude that any ' licenced ' conflict did not overun certain well defined boundaries which did not threaten the basically ' loyalist ' sentiment of local patriotism. This is illustrated by the elaborate Arbor Tree Day at Aston - on - Clun, in south - west Shropshire, where the Oak Apple Day was supplemented by an endowment provided to commemorate the wedding of a lord of the manor in 1786, consolidating the loyalist ideology of the event. **20.**

Paternalism

There is a general view of the changes that occured in rural society in the early twentieth century, which is shared by historians as diverse in their opinions as F.M.L. Thompson, Alun Howkins and Howard Newby. This sees a dominance of the landed interest until the Great War, accompanied by a paternalistic attitude towards farmworkers by the gentry. After the war the farming interest predominated and whilst paternalism never had such a high priority for farmers as it did for landowners, this became even less important as the ongoing agricultural depression worsened in the inter - war period. **21.**

In this section the workings of Shropshire paternalism will be examined, as exercised by gentry, clergy and farmers. As was discussed in the last chapter, Shropshire landed society was dominated by the gentry, and as Thompson claims ' there was a strikingly high proportion of ancient gentry families whose lineages ran unbroken from Norman or Plantaganet times.' Their treatment of their servants showed a degree of interdependence, Mary Webb's Jack Reddin ' had the faults of his class, but turning an old servant adrift was not one of them. Vessons traded on this, and invariably said and did exactly what he liked.' Such small ancient landowners as the Plowdens of Plowden played an active part in parish government and local charity administration. **22.** In the nineteenth century they were aped by the newer gentry who sought social recognition to go along with their estates, purchased with money made in trade. However incomers were often regarded with suspicion : ' Local people probably felt that they came from away and this is really what it was all about. Most of

the estate owners around here were members of old established families. They were generally very much fairer and more understanding then when an estate was bought by some ' nouveau riche " townee ", who would not have the same friendly attitude towards the people of the area.' **23.**

An example of newer gentry who tried to be paternalistic were the Allcrofts, rich Worcester glovers who bought and re - built Stokesay Court, near Craven Arms, in the late Victorian period :

> With almost everybody a tenant, Stokesay Court assumed total fiefdom...They held the patronage of both Onibury and Stokesay churches, and selected the parsons ; they chose the head and staff of the village Church of England school, which they built. From the start the family forebade licensed premises.. instead of a pub the Allcrofts built a Mission Room as a gift to the village to whom it became a meeting room...In 1900 when the newly married Herbert and Cissy returned from their honeymoon, they were met at the station by a horseless landau, and were hauled the mile and a half to the Court, uphill by their grateful tenants. **24.**

In return for this obedience, the Allcrofts tried hard to extend their largesse, hosting a yearly tenants' party, which included farmworkers and servants, as well as farmers. In 1928 this coincided with the coming of age of Miss Jewell Allcroft, who was presented with a writing table. ' Miss Allcroft responding said it seemed very sad to her that so many of the big estates in that neighbourhood were being broken up. She thought that they at Stokesay should hang together and help each other as much as possible. Nobody who did not run an estate could form any idea of what it cost...Rates and taxes were making it almost impossible for people to live on their land.' Such sentiments appeared to be effective. In January 1920, Miss Allcroft's brother had hosted a ' Victory Ball ' at Stokesay Court for 450 members of the Comrades of the Great War, which was an important event in the creation of the British Legion in Shropshire. Six years later the Craven Arms ex - servicemen grateful for his ' keenest possible interest in their welfare ' gave him a present for his coming of age. **25.**

What is all the more remarkable about this paternalism, is that Craven Arms was one of the strongholds of the rural labour movement (see pp.118 and 121), and paradoxically these activities probably included union members.

Such events, along with official welcomes when gentry were in residence, and servants' balls, continued right through our period. **26.** The coming of age in 1926 of R.W.Corbett of Longnor Hall (one of the oldest county families) involved : a pole on top of the Lawley (the overlooking hill) with an iron raven (the Corbett's badge) and a barrel of beer and a bonfire,

tea and presentation mugs for the schoolchildren, a dance with illusionist Mr. Prince, supper in the hall for thirty tenants and in the Old Laundry for cottagers and smallholders. **27.** The Corbett estate included the village of Leebotwood, where both WU and NUAW branches existed at this time. ' In general workers on the estate were well treated and enjoyed a sense of security unknown to townsfolk during the depression.' This may be a rose tinted retrospective view, but union members had very little to offer in competition to the web of dependency which paternalism still spun, and again may well have been involved in these activities themselves. **28.** Major Trevor Corbett was ' Chairman of the meeting of the ex - servicemen of Leebotwood, Longnor and Woolaston (held) to spend the substantial grant from the United Services Fund,' and as the politics of the ex - service movements became settled into the ' non - political ' British Legion, this organisation became part of the dominant paternalistic culture. On occasions this was supplemented by specific projects to provide employment for returned soldiers, such as the creation of the water gardens at Hodnet Hall by Brigadier Herbert - Percy. Corbett also became chairman of the Shropshire Wages Council in the mid - 1920s, an example of how paternalism was still seen to be even handed. **29.**

Members of the gentry were also involved in local administration. The records from Lydbury North show the active participation of the Plowdens as successive chairmen of the parish council and in doling out Poor's Estate charities, almost always to ' deserving ' labourers of the village. The trustees of the Poor's Estate were gentlemen, with only one farmer represented. It was dominated by R.H.Newill, the Earl of Powis' estate agent, and after 1916, his successor Erskine Edmonds, who used it as an adjunct to the needs of the big house, even meeting in the estate office. In 1900 Poor's Estate paid out on a sliding scale ranging from 14s. to a widow to 22s. to a man and wife with six children, which compared very well with a working wage. Although doles were mainly paid to the retired, they were also extended to the unemployed. The Poor's Estate distributed grants for apprenticeships and other educational purposes, employed a parish nurse, and had the gift of several cottage tenancies, all of which illustrates the paternalistic power of such bodies. Even though in 1900, a Lydbury North labourer was a parish councillor, the other half dozen vacancies were filled by farmers. The Earl of Powis, a co - opted member, usually sent his apologies and was represented by his agent R.W.Newill. As we have seen (p.156) Newill was a key figure in the area, as Conservative party agent, returning officer, churchwarden of St. Michael's and All Angels. Men like him clearly played an important role in the ongoing gentry paternalism which was active throughout our period. **30.**

To some, the pre - Great War clergy were seen as powerful figures : ' The rector commanded respect from all the children and it was woe betide anyone who stepped out of line '.

Sometimes this extended to a paternalistic leadership. The Rev. Cholmondely of Hodnet rebuilt the Boys' School and according to his daughter : ' I cannot assert that he was a born priest, but he was certainly a peacemaker. The parish with him at its head had a sort of homely tough freemasonry. It held together, so to speak of itself.' However, as the Church of England traditionally did not seem to take its religious or pastoral duties very seriously in Shropshire, there were perhaps as many hunting parsons as paternalistic ones. Some of those vicars who saw themselves as having a social conscience were to take a very different route. (see pp.186 - 187) **31.**

This brings us on to whether Shropshire farmers acted in a paternalistic way. The evidence in our period is nearly always retrospective and from non - farmworkers :
' They were a team. There was none of those questions that the farmer was having goose and the workmen having bread and cheese and that sort of thing '.
' Mother used to do a lot for the poor people of the village, giving them eggs and fruit.'
' I had a cowman, he was with me 27 years which says a lot for me and him doesn' t it.' **32.**

Clearly in places farmer paternalism was real. William Bright was satisifed with his first job as a 14 year old live - in farm boy in the early 1920s : ' The farmer and his wife treated me right ; food and bedding and did my washing. I lived there 12 months. We played table tennis in the evenings and I even learnt to dance. We were paid by the year - about £35 if I remember. But there was no messing about. My job was to help milk 50 cows and groom two hunter horses. I'd get up at 5.30 a.m. to get the cattle in.' Arthur Hollins, a Market Drayton farmer, records of the live - in dairy maids : ' Even in our periods of greatest distress I can' t remember anyone ever suggesting that they should be sacked ', and displays a genuine sadness at ' Jack's death after 66 years of continuous work at Fordhall, (which) broke a chain which stretched right back to my grandfather's days.' John Foster, a Bridgnorth farmer, had a similar reputation for being ' concerned with the welfare of staff's families', to the extent of fitting bathrooms in their cottages and this gave rise to similar lengths of service, like that of Bill Roberts, an NUAW activist, who spent 30 years in his employ. **33.**

Paternalism on the part of the farmers may have been derived from shared cultural experiences in the villages, the most important of which was a shared education. It seems likely that few people involved in Shropshire agriculture had much respect for formal education : ' Generally farmers and labourers alike were indifferent, even hostile to elementary education.' Of course shared educational experience in the village schools, did not automatically produce deference on the part of the farmworkers towards the farmers. This was recognised nationally by F.E.Green : ' The English farmer knows full well that there

is often little to distinguish him in culture from his farm servant. In the early years of their youth they probably attended the same National School. That very fact, instead of making the farmer more humanly disposed towards his servant, seems to accentuate his desire for deference to be shown to him by his employees.' **34.** During the war the educational opportunities of Shropshire farmworkers' children were curtailed as the farmers lobbied successfully for 12 year old boys and girls to be released early to help fill labour shortages. Also wartime profits, for the first time, allowed farmers to send their children, particularly the boys, to the cheaper public schools, breaking the links which bound village children in a common education, and probably weakening paternalism by the farmers. **35.**

One form of education which seemed to appeal to farmers in south Shropshire was the sending of their sons to learn their trade as a ' live - in ' servant on a neighbouring farm, sometimes that of a relative. This is mentioned by four of the interviewees in the Shropshire Museum Service collections. Often this took several years and it might be concluded that some time spent as a waggoner's boy or as an under waggoner, would colour their later dealings with their own workforce, although there is no direct evidence to suggest that this made them more paternalistic. **36.**

Indeed apart from a mass of evidence which illustrates how tough life was for farmworkers and their families in this period, there are some pointers to how hard faced and unjust farmers could be, which Howkins and others have examined in other parts of the country. During the 1923 crisis, **Fair Play** voiced a concern felt by farmworkers since the days of Cobbett : ' In our fathers' time, a farmer worked as hard as his men and he was content to go to market in his spring cart and heavy horse - but today . . . he must ride around in his motor car . . . the employer wants to grind the workers down to the lowest possible wage.' **37.** Furthermore Bill Glaze, a farmworker and union member from Norton, was reduced to inarticulateness when he tried to explain his exploitation to an interviewer in the 1970s : ' No harvest supper no just the £3 for harvest - An all the blumin hours done, we done a lot of overtime with that, yer know. Oh I can't tell yer how many hours we done for that . . . It's a job to get a job anywhere in them days you knows. You get cused and blumin I don't know what it is you, yer couldna leave, nothing like it is now.' **38.** An indication of how insensitive farmers could be to the wartime concerns of their employees, is revealed in the Minutes of the Shropshire War Agricultural Committee. At the time when farmers were making agricultural workers redundant so that their sons could take their places and avoid conscription : ' It was reported that a number of agricultural workers had received short notice (in some cases 24 hours only) from the military authorities to join H. M. forces, leaving *farmers* very seriously handicapped.' **39.**

One extraordinary sideline which illustrates the tenacity of paternalism is the way in which some of the labour activists were drawn in. The same month as local NUAW members began their first wartime strike at Lydbury North, local farmworkers were involved in collecting and presenting an illuminated address to R.H.Newill, the retiring Powis estate agent and principal foe. W.H.Edwards, the WU organiser, was himself ' presented with a cheque in recognition for his services as honorary treasurer of the Wem Agricultural Society at their AGM ' in 1921. Even fiery Billy Fielding was briefly drafted into the gentlemen's club of the Shropshire Council of Agriculture. He even supported the demand from his old adversary, Charles Ward, that there should be more tenant farmers rather than landowners and agents on that body, indicating perhaps to a professional union organiser that gentry paternalism was an illusion when faced with the realities of free collective bargaining. **40.**

Paternalism had another side, which ranged from thoughtlessness to downright intimidation when the view of landowner or farmer was challenged. This intolerance is described by Julian Critchley whose uncle ran the butcher's shop on the Stokesay estate : ' In the days before refrigeration . . . meat was sold off cheaply on Saturdays. In the late afternoon, the Allcrofts were inclined to telephone for a leg of lamb, an order that obliged my uncle to slaughter, butcher and deliver in time for dinner at Stokesay Court. There was no security of tenure. In the 70 or so years my kinsmen ran the shop they were kept on only a month's notice.' **41.**

Where the squire did not perform his paternal duties, he could be criticised, at least retrospectively, as Ida Gandy found when talking to a farmworker at Heath Chapel near Holdgate in Corvedale, in the 1930s : ' We asked if a squire occupied the front one (pew) ? ' No ', he answered with relish, ' thank the Lord '. Them that sat - rarely mark you - in that pew sold their property and took themselves off and good riddance too. They'd never done ought here but drew money from the people of Holdgate and spend it in London. Then he heaved a great sigh, and spoke of ' hard times ' '. The clash between shooting gentry and traditional plebian rights of access and gathering wild produce, recorded by Bushaway and others, seems comparatively rare in the county. However, Gandy records one instance over the whinberry crop, so vital to the south Shropshire cottage economy : ' The villagers possessed an ancient right to cut peat there, a right enjoyed by all the adjoining parishes, and actually they used this right to go on Black Hill as soon as the whinberries ripened. But one year the landlord chose to close it when there were grouse about, and the keeper received orders accordingly. Hilda, her blue eyes flashing, gave me a spirited account of what happened when he tried to interfere with herself and her friends. ' He thought to scarify us, but we took him and ' bamboozled ' him in the heather. There were six of us and we showed we'd stand no nonsense! ' **42.**

Inevitably, there were severe disputes between paternalism and the emerging Shropshire labour movement. Although in the 1870s farmers and gentry did not go so far as to organise ' anti unions ' . . . complete with brass bands and banners, and tea for 1,500 workmen, their wives and families ' which Malcolm Wanklyn has identified in Gloucestershire and Herefordshire, the ideological split was evident in Shropshire. (see p.35) In the 20th century, after industrial disputes : ' The employers had adopted a system of petty persecutions ' as old scores were often settled in the guise of redundancy (see p.50). Particularly during election time, as we shall see, paternalism showed the iron hand under the velvet glove. **43.**

Institutions reinforcing paternalism

A number of institutions developed which had the effect of reinforcing paternalism. It is commonly said that there was little ideological tension between gentry and farmers in Shropshire and the strength of support for fox hunting is one reason to confirm this view. Many landlords were often long established residents, with a distinct local patriotism. Many of them took agriculture seriously and the distance from London inclined them to indulge in other country pursuits. ' Sport was a powerful bond, field sports in particular, providing those occasions of ' unceremonious intercourse ' between gentry and farmers that engendered mutual admiration and respect.' According to Stamper : ' In 1843 the leading sports writer ' Nimrod ' asserted that no other county showed more respect for the ' noble science ' or had more sportsmen and well wishers among the ' higher orders ' and the yeomen, the result being an ' excellent feeling ' between tenant and landlord.' The first Shropshire pack in 1753 were known as the True Blues, an indication perhaps of their political credentials. **44.**

Here, as elsewhere in the country, there was an attempt to extend this ' excellent feeling ' to rural workers, as ' spotters ' (who built artificial earths and fed ' wild ' foxes), and to publicans who victualled the hunters, gate - openers, and hunt followers. Although John Foster, past master of Wheatland Hunt feels : ' Farmworkers had so few interests. They might have had a peep at it whilst they were working, but there were very few followers in Shropshire. Country people had to work so hard, but a true countryman could tell you where the fox had gone.' **45.** The Hunts put effort into maintaining goodwill throughout rural society. Typical perhaps, was a dinner given at Shawbury in 1912, for Keepers and Earth Stoppers, where 80 guests were served by the Master of Fox Hounds (M.F.H.) Captain H. H. Heywood - Lonsdale, who urged his audience : ' simply leave the foxes alone. He would try his best to catch the foxes if they would stop the earth.' **46.**

By 1900 Shropshire boasted five packs of foxhounds, (the United especially being considered the farmers' pack) one pack of harriers and one of beagles, and still maintained this level in 1929. As a comparison, on the other side of England, Norfolk, with a population and acreage nearly twice as large, could only support six assorted packs. With so many foxhunting landowners, the tension between the shooting and hunting interests was lessened. In the words of the **VCH** : ' Shropshire has never been regarded as notable shooting country.' Many estates included in their tenancy agreements with their farmers the demand that wire fences were to be taken down by 1st November. Many farmers were foxhunters : ' it was a form of local entertainment, life wasn't so busy in winter. It was a way of doing business. ' **47.**

The Hunts also tried to placate those farmers who were not ' sportsmen ', for example, in the 1920s, the Wynnstay Hunt organised a yearly garden party for farmers and their families at Obley, near Ellesmere. The development of the United Pack's ' Point to Point ' as a key event in the county social calendar of the inter - war years, also aided the process. In 1928 the executive of the Shropshire NFU devised a plan for farmers' produce lists to be distributed to hunt followers, to protect vulnerable crops. The same year the tenants of Lord Acton of Aldenham Hall presented him with a hunting saddle and horn, at his ' coming of age.' Acton was one of the older gentry, the grandson of the famous Liberal historian and his own father had briefly supported the Labour Party before his death. The young man became a member of his local Conservative Association, and the gift seems to symbolise the harmony between gentry and farmers, and the strength and political influence of paternalism. **48.**

Even at the height of the Great War, foxhunting was maintained. When the South Shropshire Hunt applied for exemption from conscription for their kennelman : ' Colonel Wolseley Jenkins said the military had no objection at all to the application. It was a recognised thing that hunting should be kept up.' Young landowners, and the sons of their tenants also rode together in the ranks of the Yeomanry. Originally formed as part time cavalry troops during the Napoleonic Wars, they intermittently continued in the role of preserving public order, until they were revived as a serious military reserve unit at the time of the Boer War. Their personnel were interchangeable with enthusiastic fox - hunters - their commanding officer was always a Master of Fox Hounds - and their social events were the most important in the county. The yeomanry were part of the state apparatus. When the ' Shropshire Dragoons ' were raised from the ranks of the Yeomanry, as an aide to the civil power during the 1921 railway strike, M.F.H. Colonel H.H.Heywood - Lonsdale was given command. **49.**

Other sports may have had the effect of confirming paternalism. Although ' Cricket was markedly less successful in attracting the interest of the working classes ' , it did mix social

classes. Thomas Lewis, who left Clungunford to become a draper in Knighton ' frequently played cricket with the squire's two sons.' However it is easy to exaggerate nostalgically the effect of cricket on the village green in binding rural society. According to one observer : ' There are no games. There is no recreation ground, no village green ...It is a fine evening , but there are no children at play... ' Ay the farmers get up a match at cricket among 'emselves once or twice i' summer.' ' Don't the boys play? ' Naw. Summon gied 'em a bat but they bin and lost the ball.' In contrast, football, had ' rapidly acquired a large working class following and football clubs . . . were to be found in almost every town and village in the county '. **50.** Although the sport itself was a closed world to the gentry, and the village clubs were largely self - contained, a measure of paternalism existed in the presentation of competition cups : ' We had at Broome a cricket team, an airgun team, a table tennis team, a darts team, a dominoes team and a tennis team. Our airgun team won the Norfolk Cup three years running from 1909 to 1911, and the football team won the Blowers Shield in 1924.' **51.**

Another major village institution were the friendly societies. In 1891 friendly societies were the largest working class organisation, their 4 million members dwarfing the trade union movement and the co - operative societies. Mutual societies of a local nature existed in Shropshire from the eighteenth century, as a working class defence against sickness and unemployment, some catering specifically for women. They were joined in the mid - Victorian period by larger nationally organised affiliated orders, like the Foresters and Oddfellows, which organised local branches. **52.** In his recent study of friendly societies in East Yorkshire, David Neave suggests that the local societies largely based in ' closed ' villages were dominated and often created by landowners, as a way of encouraging thrift amongst their cottagers. He finds that a high percentage of their rural members were farmworkers, and although the affiliated societies often adopted branch names to flatter the local gentry, they were lively and independent organisations, which trained working class people in skills they would transfer to nonconformist chapels or trade unions. **53.**

Some of these findings can be confirmed from Shropshire evidence. The old established Hawkstone Society was organised around estate workers, the Bishop's Castle and Lydbury North Female Friendly Society enjoyed the patronage of the countess of Powis and the Shropshire naval hero - Captain Corbett's name graced several lodges of the Ancient Order of Foresters. However the friendly societies were adversely affected by the national insurance reforms introduced by the Edwardian Liberal government. The effects on the local societies were particularly severe, the Bishop's Castle and Lydbury North Female Society, for example, was dissolved in this period. **54.**

Despite having a more secure national financial base, the affiliated orders were clearly worried by the insurance changes but in the Edwardian period they were enjoying their heyday as key rural cultural institutions. The surviving Resolution Book of the Loyal Vale of Clun Oddfellows Lodge, based near Lydbury North, includes a calendar of funeral processions, annual church parade, Hospital Sunday walks and Dinner, anniversary sports and Coronation celebrations, with appropriate regalia, branch banner, and the Bishop's Castle Town Band. **55.** Occasionally critical of individual members ' so frequently in receipt of sick pay ' , it was a financially prudent organisation, having money invested in Madras Railway securities and in loan stock of Manchester Corporation, and also being involved in local speculative building of ' villas '. The officers of the lodge also showed a bias towards the more substantial members of rural society. Whilst detailed evidence on the social composition of the lodge is unavailable, one of the trustees was Richard Kilvert, a farmer, NFU county committee member, President of the South Shropshire Farmers' Association, Conservative Association officer, parish councillor, and later member of the Shropshire War Agricultural Committee. All of this suggests that Neave's conclusion about the independence of the organisations could be questioned and that the friendly society played a role within rural society which at best was non threatening and was more likely to be seen as a respectable working class pillar of ' Shropshire patriotism '. **56.**

The friendly societies were further weakened by the war. The local Shropshire Provident Society passed a ' wartime amendment of rules to allow life assurance of members who lost their lives in the war to be paid.' The Vale of Clun Foresters patriotically agreed to the ' payment of the contribution of members now serving in the Army or Navy and it was resolved to pay all such contributions out of the Distress Fund.' **57.** Whilst paying for members killed in the services may not have been actuarially prudent, the cause of the decline of the societies was the gradual extension of national insurance, even to farmworkers, and the cultural backwardness of their social activities, compared to the jazz bands and charabanc outings of the post - war period. The quarterly pariochial church council meeting at Lydbury North could still declare, as late as 1926, that ' The Friendly Societies' Church Parade on 1st August had been a great success ' but gradually fewer reports appeared in the local press reflecting the national decline of these once great institutions. However some of the local societies continued. The Wem Cow Club, which provided insurances for cottagers and smallholders who had less than 6 beasts, actually grew in numbers of members from 71 in 1910 to 78 in 1925 and totalled a respectable membership of 65 at the end of our period. However as we shall see, ' Shropshire patriotism ' was to have other ways of making its influence felt. **58.**

One direction was in the handling of politics, where in the relatively new age of mass democracy, gentry paternalism, farmers' toughness and plain intimidation were a potent mix. Even in Ackleton which had the second largest NUAW branch in the county, one old woman recalled of her Edwardian childhood : ' I can remember every child in the school had to wear a blue rosette . . . the agent said tell them they're Conservative or else, you know what I shall do? He came down to the house . . . Oh yes that's the gentry for yer. You don't know what this village was like.' **59.** Intimidation followed when the Labour Party began to stand, as the 1923 bye election in Ludlow showed : ' tenants of tied cottages who dared not show the Labour colours, everywhere the chains of feudal oppression ' and the following year Tom Morris blamed his defeat at Oswestry on ' several glaring cases where people were almost afraid of being seen speaking to him. One man had told him that after the election he had lost his job. It takes real men and women to take their stand for Labour.' **60.**

By the beginning of our period the Birmingham radicalism which the instinctively Conservative Shropshire gentry and farmers feared so much in the 1870s, had transmogrified into Unionism and tariff reform. The Tory party's hegemony in the county was complete. Even in the Liberal landslide of 1906, four Conservatives were returned by the county and only one Liberal. As Wanklyn shows, the pre - war Liberal attempt to drive a wedge between farmers and gentry by the reform of the Game Laws was a failure in non - shooting Shropshire, and the overwhelmingly ' landed ' interest of the local Tories was enough to discourage the launch of farmers' candidates as happened in Herefordshire and elsewhere. In a similar way, the land reform issue gained little support for the Liberals from Shropshire farmers and when retained by the post - war Labour Party it made it even less idelogically appealing within the county. **61.**

Mary Webb gave the basic views of the well-established Tory Shropshire squire to Jack Reddin in **Gone to Earth** : ' he could not help being the kind of man that supplies the most rabid imperialists, reactionaries, materialists. (He always spoke of the heathen Chinee, lower orders, beastly foreigners, mad Fanatics and silly sentimentalists, these last being those who showed any sign of mercy). It seemed that he could not help seeing nothing outside his narrow views.' **62.** However, it would be wrong to imply that political organisation was neglected by the Conservatives. In the pre-war period, popular support for mass conservatism was mobilised by the Primrose League. In its heyday (1910) its membership was between 2 and 5 million, according to various historians' estimates. Members enjoyed ' lantern shows, concerts, tea parties, garden parties and any social functions organised. In some rural parts of the country it was strong, the **Primrose League Gazette** suggesting (perhaps inaccurately) that of its reported membership, at least 57% were either agricultural labourers or persons living in small towns.' Although it did exist in Shropshire, and attempts

were made to revive it after 1918, these do not seem to have been successful. Nationally, Howkins suggests as an explanation for its decline that deferential politics became anachronistic and failed to adapt to modern Conservatism, a rare failing of that political party. **63.**

The surviving Conservative minute book from Lydbury North, dating from 1886 to 1924, when read in conjunction with the parish records, indicate the enmeshed network of gentry and farmer involvement in the party. One gentry family, the Plowdens, father followed by son, provided the Association chairman and R. H. Newill, the Earl of Powis' agent was the Secretary (with the Earl as a member) and W. Carfield, who was on the county NFU committee, was canvasser. The local association was well organised with fetes, whist drives and the visit of a cinema van. A surviving set of canvas cards for the village of Edgton and relating to the 1923 election show an almost total Tory domination, with only two socialist votes and one Liberal farmer. **64.**

This political domination was reinforced by the Conservative local press. The **Shrewsbury Chronicle** was very right wing after the war and anti - socialist headlines like ' The Bolshie At Home and Abroad ', ' Quicksands of Socialism ' and ' Shropshire Solid Against Socialism : Back to Sanity ' were common. It seemed reluctant even to allow the Labour Party a place in the political process, commenting in the 1923 General Election : ' Shrewsbury was not troubled with a Labour candidate, although Oswestry was ' and describing the ' May Day proceedings ' as ' depressing and uninspired '. Between 1922 and 1929 it expressed support for the British Fascists, often reprinting features from its journal **The Patriot** such as ' The Machinations of British Jews ', and running a futuristic fascist serial ' A Man Armed ', written by Winifred Roberts, a Shropshire woman who later became active in the BUF. These were supplemented with local anti - semitic readers' letters, particularly when a Jewish Liberal briefly won the Shrewsbury Parliamentary seat in 1923. **65.**

In addition, the national industrial disputes of the post war period mobilised in Shropshire as elsewhere a loyalist consensus to support the government and the established order. So the railway strike of 1919 saw emergency distribution committees set up. In 1921 defence force units were mobilised in Shrewsbury barracks during the miners' strike and the 1926 General Strike saw a plethora of voluntary service committees. Although this indicates that the local state was prepared to use coercion, the events of May 1926 demonstrated that the county establishment successfully used gentler tactics. Farmworkers were not involved in the strike, and the Lydbury North parish council felt it wiser not to call on them to volunteer to help maintain emergency services. Despite mass action by railwaymen and miners there were only two reported incidents in the county, and the comment of Shropshire's Chief Constable

seems to sum up the conservatism of the county : ' I feel I must express to all strikers my appreciation of their good behaviour during the strike.' **66.**

Nonconformity and alternative ideologies

In some rural areas of Britain popular nonconformity provided a cultural and even political alternative ideology to the prevailing conservative view of the dominant gentry. In this section it is argued that the strength given by religious nonconformity to an independent rural working class culture was lacking in Shropshire. The old cliché has it that the British labour movement owes more to Methodism than Marx. In the study of agricultural trade unionism much has been made of its strong links with Primitive Methodism, particularly in the nineteenth century. It is difficult to argue with John D. Gay's conclusion that : ' To a considerable extent Primitive Methodism was used by the nineteenth century worker as a medium to fight his battle for recognition as a human being. The countless country chapels erected by the Primitive Methodists provided the rural worker with his symbol of independence and defiance of the established social order under which he suffered.' However, there is a sense that this defiance was cultural rather than political, and certainly not economic. The claims of Hobsbawm and Rudé and others that the revivals in popular nonconformity closely followed the defeats of direct action in the early nineteenth century also seem very plausible. **67.**

Undoubtedly Methodism, both Primitive and Wesleyan, was important in the creation of the unions in the 1870s, particularly in the Midlands and East Anglia. Nigel Scotland's work, whilst sound on the chapel origins of many of the national and local leaders, vastly overstates the issue and ignores other major factors such as the role of emigration agents, as Peacock pointed out in his review of Scotland's book. A more balanced approach to Methodism comes from Obelkivich and Howkins. The latter, although acknowledging the importance of the chapel culture for the early unions, also points out the opposition of much of the Methodist hierarchy and the more important role of structural (i.e. class) conflict inherent in farm work. He suggests that the decline of radical nonconformity in the 1890s gave it a relatively weak role in the union revival of 1906. **68.**

Shropshire, Gay suggests, was conservative in its religion, pointing out the late survival of recusancy, the weakness of Old Dissent and the relative strength of the Church of England synonymous with the gentry domination of the county. All this made nonconformity relatively feeble : ' The Shropshire countryside, where most people depended for their livelihoods on conservative landowners, was never a very promising recruiting ground for dissenters, and it is noticeable that country chapels tend to be in isolated spots out of the public eye.' Although

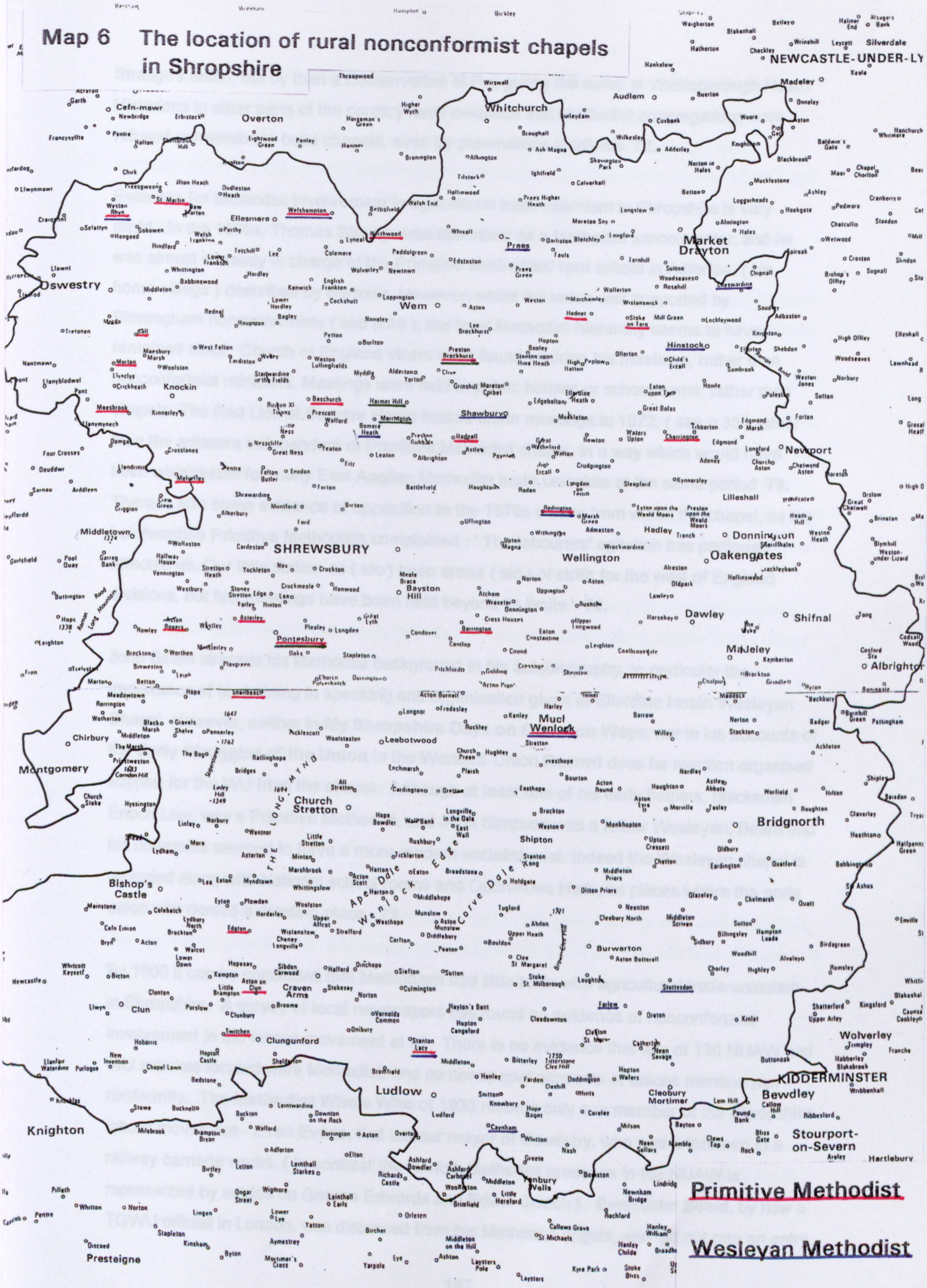
there was some Methodism in the county - Shropshire was a circuit by 1792 - it took the Industrial Revolution for nonconformity to make a major impact. In the eastern coalfield, Congregationalism and Quakerism were common amongst the ironmasters and the Primitive Methodist revivals from the 1820s won favour amongst many of their employees : ' The Severn Gorge became an active centre of nonconformist evangelism within the county.' **69.**

There was a slow and erratic growth of Primitive Methodism in the agricultural parts of the county, with in the 1820s, circuits based on Prees Green and Ludlow and a mission to Bishops Castle. There were early chapels in Wilcott, Ruyton and Harmer Hill and a circuit in Hadnall by 1838. A chapel was started at Bomere Heath in 1836 and ' not a few farming families were to be found in its fellowship ', in addition to an earlier (1822) Independent congregation. By the 1870s there were Primitive Methodist congregations in many villages where unions were later to be found - Bayston Hill (1861), Church Stretton (1872), Shawbury (n.d.), as well as mining areas like Clee Hill, Pontesbury and Minsterley. A Royal Commission on Historic Monuments (R.C.H.M.) chapel survey, although far from complete, records Primitive chapels in other villages like Berrington, Rodington, Marton, Baschurch and Hodnet where union branches later appeared (see Map 6). **70.**

However, only 21 Primitive Methodist chapels and 9 Wesleyan chapels have been identified in agricultural villages out of a total of over 100 chapels found in the county. By far the largest number of chapels were in the market towns, the settlements of the eastern coalfield and in the isolated mining/quarrying communities, where villages like Pontesbury had four nonconformist chapels of various denominations. It is possible to find clumps of chapels in the areas of the county where the unions were later strong (see p.71), e.g. in the sandstone villages north of Shrewsbury, virtually every village had Primitive Methodist and Wesleyan chapels. However, a causal link has not been established. In other areas where the NUAW was well established, like the lower Severn valley, the R.C.H.M. survey has found no chapels at all. In the south west of the county, which had union activity from the 1870s, the villages with chapels (Aston on Clun, Edgton and Twitchen) were not the ones with union branches, which were found in neighbouring villages. It seems likely that it was the open nature of these villages, and therefore the ability to obtain land to build a chapel, which was the deciding factor rather than an inherent radicalism, which gave rise to nonconformist and later trade union protest. **71.**

In addition, the radical stance of these wayside ' Bethel ' should not be assumed. As Howard Burrows points out, chapel sites were often developed with the support of large local landowners. He cites Lady Langdabin giving money and land to congregations at Adforton and Brampton Bryan in the 1860s, and Lady Leighton (wife of Sir Baldwin, patron of

Map 6 The location of rural nonconformist chapels in Shropshire



Strange's union, but by then a Conservative M.P.) giving the same at Wattleborough Heath. Historians in other parts of the country have evidence that Methodist congregations were refused permission to build chapels, even by paternalistic landlords. **72.**

Evidence for Methodist involvement in agricultural trade unionism in Shropshire is very slight. In the 1870s, Thomas Strange was described as a Methodist schoolmaster, and he was almost certainly in charge of the Primitive Methodists' own school in Adforton, (his home village) described by Burrows. However, whilst his union was supported by Birmingham nonconformists (see p.35), the local Methodist hierarchy seems to have remained aloof. Church of England vicars were found chairing his meetings, rather than nonconformist ministers. Meetings were held in public houses or schoolrooms, rather than chapels. The Red Lion at Bomere Heath hosted union meetings in 1872, (see p.35) rather than the adjacent Independent or Primitive Methodist chapel, in a way which would have been unthinkable for many East Anglian Methodist trade unionists at the same period **73.** There is also some evidence of opposition to the 1870s unions from within the chapel, as the Leintwardine Primitive Methodists complained : ' The labourers' agitation has perilously affected us. Our little station as (sic) been arena (sic) of strife for the west of England divisions, but few meetings have been held beyond its limits.' **74.**

John Beard stresses his Methodist background in his autobiography, in particular the importance of his training in speaking and organisation given at Ellerdine Heath Wesleyan Chapel. However, neither in **My Shropshire Days on Common Ways**, nor in his accounts of the **Early Struggles of the Union** in the Workers' Union **Record** does he mention organised support for the WU from the chapel. Although at least one of his early helpers, blacksmith Enoch Low, was a Primitive Methodist, and John Simpson was a fellow Wesleyan, Beard and his comrades seemed to have a more modern socialist goal. Indeed the Wesleyan chapel is recorded along with National school rooms and Oddfellows Halls, as places where the early union was denied a meeting place. **75.**

By 1900 it can be concluded that Methodism had little to do with agricultural trade unionism in Shropshire. A survey of local newspapers has found no evidence of nonconformist involvement in the labour movement at all. There is no evidence that any of 130 NUAW and WU activists located were Methodist, and no newspaper accounts of unions mention non - conformity. The **Methodist Who's Who** of 1933 records only one member of the Shropshire labour movement - Evan Evans, first Labour mayor of Oswestry, who was a foreman in a railway carriage works. (In contrast the Norfolk Methodist presence in the NUAW is represented by entries on George Edwards and Edwin Gooch). Even John Beard, by now a TGWU official in London, was distanced from his Methodist origins, and did not rate an entry.

Ironically, The **Methodist Who's Who** contains several entries for prosperous Shropshire tradesmen, like Richard Francis, poulterer and butcher, and Mayor of Bishop's Castle, and farmers like Wilfred Roberts of Aston Pigot near Westbury - possibly men who were instinctively anti - union. Local historians of Methodism have found no links with agricultural trades unionism, and one, John Lenten concludes ' Shropshire was more a county of Methodist smallholders and miners '. To an extent the declining relationship between the labour movement and nonconformity is mirrored in other parts of the country. Pretty concludes of rural Wales in the 1920s : ' the Labour Party could not count on attracting much support from the Nonconformist heirarchy.' Howkins records the same development even in Norfolk, the heartland of the ' chapel culture'. **76.**

One or two Shropshire nonconformist ministers expressed support for the Labour movement, like Reverend L. Baker Short - ejected from the Shrewsbury Unitarian Church in 1929 for his views, but the bulk of religious support for the unions seems to have come from the Church of England. The Reverend F.J.Stanley, vicar of Great Ness, preaching at the Labour Sunday service in Shrewsbury in 1914 declared : ' broadly speaking, the principles of socialism were the principles of christianity.' Post war, Reverend C.E.Warner, vicar of Bishop's Castle, spoke at a NUAW meeting at Lydbury North in 1920. In Shrewsbury, three other Church of England vicars spoke at Shrewsbury May Day events and conducted a special Trade Union service at the Abbey. Two of these, the Reverends Gordon Cartlidge and S. Skelhorn, became regular speakers at the annual Shrewsbury Workers' Union Dinner and Social. Skelhorn's recruitment to the Labour Party became a local cause celebre, and as vicar of a rural parish (Great Wollaston), he seems to have also supported the NUAW, speaking to at least one of their joint meetings with the NUR at the Railwaymen's Hut in Craven Arms. Around Oswestry, the Rev. E.K.Jones of Cefn, spoke in favour of the Labour Prospective Parliamentary Candidate, as did Rev. T. D. Jones of Llanerfyl, who was a Labour member of Montgomeryshire County Council. **77.** It should also be recalled that Rev. J. D. La Touche, vicar of Stokesay, was recruited to chair meetings of Strange's union in 1872 and Rev. D. R. Murray, rector of Brampton, was the first president of the West of England Union. The impact of ' Red vicars ' with working class congregations, and their role in the labour movement, is an unfortunate omission from current historiography. **78.**

By the 1920s, Howkins sees a relatively weak role for Methodism in the NUAW even in Norfolk. In Shropshire agricultural trades unionism, Methodism's role was minor in the 1870s and non - existent by 1930 and what religious support there was for the political left came from the established church. Whilst in some rural areas the culture of nonconformity might have helped to forge a distinctive working class ideology, in Shropshire a rural radicalism would have to be developed without this culture and derive its underpinning from modern

socialist ideas. In addition the comparative overall weakness of nonconformity in the county meant that there was virtually no middle class nonconformist dissenting tradition, particularly after the collapse of industry in the Ironbridge Gorge, to challenge the prevailing conservative/Anglican hegemony of ' local patriotism '.

An alternative ideology to challenge Shropshire patriotism was slow to develop. Historically the Liberal Party was weak in the county and the Labour Party was slow to emerge outside Shrewsbury and even here the apparent left wing views of the movement could easily be caricatured by the local press - which concentrated on the outward forms of revolution. **79.**

As we have seen, there was a ' rural radicalism ' associated with the clusters of villages where the NUAW was strong and where it had some district councillors and Tom Morris as a Labour county councillor. However, as we shall go on to compare, the numbers of participants in Labour Party events - the largest located was 100 for a tea party in Ludlow - were puny compared with mobilisations on behalf of Shropshire patriotism. **80.**

Immediately after the war there was some optimism that this might be challenged. The Newport NUAW branch tried to persuade their EC to contest the parliamentary seat declaring : ' When one knows how reactionary was the farmworkers' vote in the county only a short time ago, the opposition of the squire and others to the union is not to be wondered at.' However both the union and the labour movement missed the chance given by its dramatic post war growth to capitalise on potential political opportunities. By the disastrous Ludlow bye - election of 1923 the opportunity was demonstrably impossible and a post mortem on the result showed a mixture of frustration and helplessness over the size of the task. Harry Drinkwater, the Midland organiser, contributed a long piece to **Labour Organiser** : ' Not since I was a lad have I seen such " true - blueism " displayed alike by farmers' lads, country squire and village tradesman . . . utter lack of any labour or trade union movement. It is indeed rare to discover a constituency of 700 or 800 square miles without a single Trades Council or properly organised party. There were whole villages, even towns without a trade union branch . . . With less than half - a - dozen active spirits, and all organisation . . . had to be carted at big expense 150 miles to the scene of the contest.' **81.**

This gives a good picture of the sheer poverty of the Labour effort in rural constituencies. Another example is Michael Foot's campaign to win Monmouth in the 1935 General Election, when Labour had one car and the candidate was reduced on occasion to a horse and cart. Even from Norfolk, S. J. Gee, the Labour agent in Cromer could report : ' We cannot win with the labourers' vote alone. Many still do not belong to a Trade Union and many of their wives do not vote for Labour at all.' Wise words on the Ludlow debacle came too from W. B. Taylor, the Norfolk NUAW County Secretary : ' My only tip is this : get countrymen to talk to

countrymen in a language they understand, and that by a man they know to be true and straight '. Taylor who had struggled for the Labour vote, knew when rural workers were being patronised by urban socialists and sensed that the appeal of socialism as perceived by most Shropshire farmworkers was limited compared with other strategies that were on offer. **82.**

The right wing drift of the WU in Shropshire may owe something to an attempted seizure of middle ground from the hegemony of ' Shropshire patriotism '. This attempt, too, ended in failure with the two 1920 Wrekin bye elections. A photograph published in the WU **Record** shows one of their organisers, Mark Scott, riding a motorbike on which are election posters reading ' To All Friends Round the Wrekin Vote Duncan ' (see Photograph 14). Their attempt to wear the clothes of ' Shropshire patriotism ' failed too. **83.**

The contrast with the numbers mustered by the Conservatives is striking. The Junior Imperial League, a forerunner of the Young Conservatives, welcomed 600 to its Empire Day Dinner in Shrewsbury in 1924 and in 1926 claimed 1,349 members. **84.** The Conservatives organised elaborate outings for the marginal Wrekin constituency, providing a patronage with which the Labour party could not compete :

> In 1931 the M.P. for The Wrekin was Colonel Baldwin - Webb and the Wrekin Conservative Party at this time organised the Baldwin - Webb Outings. Besides keeping the party in the news, they gave the constituents the chance to see parts of the country they would not have otherwise enjoyed. These outings were train excursions and people took advantage of them in their hundreds, flocking to their railway station to board the special excursion trains. One year they visited the Military Tattoo in London, and a most spectacular sight it was. Meals were served on the train and appetites whetted for the next Baldwin - Webb Outing. I remember two more of these great Shropshire outings. One was to Isle of Wight with a beautiful view of the Needles, and the other, in 1938 was to the British Empire Exhibition in Glasgow with a sail round the Kyles of Bute. Col. Baldwin - Webb, with his sister and agent, travelled to Glasgow by aeroplane, so that they were there to welcome the Shropshire constituents when they arrived. **85.**

Shropshire also shared in the national development of Empire Day, often coinciding with a sanitised version of May Day celebrations. This too was developed as a tool for inculcating school children into deference,and patronage needed to sustain Shropshire patriotism :

> This meant half a day off school after the celebrations, to which the vicar, squire and parents were invited. Children entertained by showing their school work and

singing songs from the national Song Book, patriotic songs such as Jerusalem, Rule Britannia and, of course, the National Anthem.
I went to Lea Cross School on the 1920s...on Empire Day we had a half day off school and walked up to Hinton Hall. Col. Head and his wife were school governors. The girls would all dance round the maypole and we'd have a big tea party and the run of the parklands - it was smashing! Mrs Head and her three daughters would put down Treasure Hunts for us. **86.**

In Shrewsbury Empire Day brought 3,500 children to celebrate in the Square. In addition Coronations, jubilees and royal visits were used throughout the period to reinforce the prevailing patriotic trends. **87.**

New village institutions

Shropshire patriotism was not static. In order to provide for the needs of the whole rural community the rural elite had regularly to review and change its operation. Their ability to do this in the face of agricultural depression and rural depopulation was a particular strength and one made possible by the cultural fluidity after the Great War. In this section we shall examine some of the new village institutions which reinforced the cultural hegemony of the gentry and farmers in Shropshire.

Although farmers' organisations existed in the 1870s and were originally formed as a response to agricultural trade unionism, they did not have a continuous existence. Shropshire seems not to have been active in the tenant farmers' associations of the 1890s and the strength of its indigenous gentry - farmer understanding held it aloof from the various rural interest alliances proposed between that time and the 1920s. **88.** However, the county National Farmers' Union (NFU) was formed in 1908, soon after the national foundation of the organisation in Lincolnshire. It very rapidly established itself as the voice of Shropshire, representing small as well as large members. It moved from a pre - war preoccupation with particular problems to being the employers' negotiators for the wage level settlement in the county's premier industry. The confidence with which it occupied the latter role is shown by its view on the 1919 strikes : ' Referring to the strike of agricultural labourers which occurred in the middle of the corn harvest, and which affected several villages on the Shropshire border, the report stated that the machinery of the Union enabled members all over the county to keep in touch with each other and act in unity. Arrangements for mutual assistance were organised, and as a result, members successfully weathered the stormy period.' **89.**

By and large, once it had rejected the idea of separate political representation, as was attempted in neighbouring Herefordshire, the Shropshire NFU's political voice was seamless and consistent for the Conservative Party. When C.S.Fawcett, a farmer from Montford Bridge and Labour Party member, questioned the support for conservativism, he was soon ostracised and resigned from the NFU county committee. Similarly, an unknown farmer, who tried to support Labour's land nationalisation proposals at a Shrewsbury meeting in the 1918 election was hooted down. **90.** The county NFU minutes show little conflict with landowners, and the Shropshire branch of the Central Landowners' Association was only formed after a meeting convened by the Earl of Powis in 1921 and thereafter did not have a high profile. By January 1920, their view that : ' The south Shropshire branch NFU claimed to show benefits to the advance not only of all farmers and farmworkers but to every member of the community ' had widespread credence. The NFU was backed by the **Shrewsbury Chronicle** in its campaign for ' Brighter Villages' as a counter to the perceived problem of rural depopulation. A number of new developments were allied to this campaign in the post - war period. **91.**

As was discussed in the last chapter, farmworkers often maintained a pride in their abilities. Farmers searched for new ways to increase the skills and interest of their workforce and one development was the reintroduction of ploughing matches. Howkins has pointed out their importance along with other rewards and devices promoted by agricultural societies, in establishing stability and harmony amongst the workforce in the mid - Victorian rural prosperity. In the succeeding agricultural depression, ploughing matches died out, although Mutch found traces of them in Lancashire in the Edwardian period. **92.** In Shropshire their first revival took place with a ploughing meeting at Cruckton in October 1927 : ' the first held in the Shrewsbury district for several years '. This was applauded by ' Farm and Market ' in the **Shrewsbury Chronicle** : ' Farmworkers welcomed the opportunity given of testing their skills in competition with the champions of neighbouring villages '. **93.**

The following year a ' second Cruckton Ploughing and Sheepdog Trial ', had 27 entries and drew a crowd of ' over a thousand ' and by 1930 the competition also included hedging. Cups were presented and photographs of the winners appeared in the **Shrewsbury Chronicle.** The Atcham Society promoted its own competition with 70 ploughmen and 46 hedgers at Uppington. After this beginning, such competitions again became part of the wider growth of agricultural shows. **94.** This combination of recreation and education may also be linked to the formation of the first Young Farmers' Clubs in Shropshire, which were deliberately seen as harmonising the interests of farmers and farmworkers. By the end of the decade other YFCs were formed by the NFU in Shrewsbury and north Shropshire. **95.**

For the first time, the ' Brighter Villages ' campaign included a secular organisation specifically for women - the Women's Institute. Originating in Canada, they were started in Britain during the war, and were fostered by the women's branch of the Board of Agriculture as a way of increasing food production and domestic self - reliance in the absence of men folk. Their first appearance in Shropshire was probably at Bishop's Castle in May 1918, when ' A very useful demonstration of boot mending was given by Mrs. Redford '. They became independent in 1919, and although they still could not throw off their government sponsored image, as Howkins points out : ' They provided a focus for village women to organise on vital issues such as education, rural housing and sanitation, as well as broadening their concerns into organisations like the League of Nations Union.' **96.**

This is confirmed with some qualifications by Maggie Morgan, whose recent work claims that : ' The Women's Institute Movement was involved in numerous social welfare campaigns for amenities such as rural water supplies, analgesics for rural women in childbirth and demanded that Agricultural Wages Boards should include at least one female representative in 1930.' She also stresses the importance of the W.I.s in developing ' female controlled cultural space...Here women could develop their confidence away from the scrutiny of men' and ' the opportunities the Institutes provided for women to earn money, particularly through the sales tables at the meetings and later with the setting up of W.I.markets in towns.' **97.**

By the mid 1920s W.I. branches were found in most Shropshire villages and the **Shrewsbury Chronicle** included a W.I.column. However, a surviving minute book of the Lydbury North branch shows the 20 odd members enjoying a mundane programme with fruit bottling demonstrations, folk dancing displays and a dance with the Junior Imperial League band providing the music. In the ballot for Shropshire respresentatives on the National Executive Committee in 1933, both candidates were titled, implying that the W.I.s' allegiance was to the dominant culture. **98.** Although the trade unions were critical of the ' Jam and Jerusalem ' image of the W.I., there is evidence that farmers also felt threatened by them. ' Women in disputes, as we calls 'em, ' said a Radnor Forest farmer to Ida Gandy. As Armstrong points out in the 1930s : ' there were . . .more farmworkers' wives in the Women's Institutes than husband in the trade unions ' and there is no doubt that the organisation reflected the ' patriotic ' view. In Shropshire it was a prime component of the Empire Day celebrations and all that implied : ' The highlight of the year was the tea party given by our local Women's Institute on Empire Day. All the children would line up in rows in front of the Union jack and sing God Save The King, then they would march past and salute before going to the field nearby where they held all kinds of sports. Afterwards they would tidy themselves up and march up to the Hall where they were entertained to a marvellous tea.' **99.**

' Brighter Villages Wanted ' was the headline of ' Farm and Market ' in July 1922. As the post war agricultural depression began to bite, the **Shropshire Chronicle** sought a solution to the rural depopulation which seemed to threaten the livelihood of the county : ' The war, too, has played its part. The men have returned restless and more ambitious, and consequently they have set out to seek their fortunes in the big cities.' The debate had been going on since the end of the war : ' If they were to have a greater production of food from rural areas, they must endeavour to make the life of those working on the land more pleasant and agreeable '. **100**. At the same time the war memorial movement was sweeping the country and many saw the solution to both problems in the erection of memorial halls. Some villages had meeting or reading rooms prior to the Great War, but these were nearly always supplied and often run by paternalistic gentry. They were usually too small for the more varied social and cultural activities which the post war period seemed to open up.

Although some ex-servicemen and in places the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Soldiers and Sailors (NFDDSS) were in favour of such utilitarian schemes, in Shropshire, as we have seen (p.132), the Federation, led by W. H. Edwards, put considerable effort into establishing their own stone memorial cross. This view of commemoration was often shared by gentry and farmers who favoured capital expenditure on a stone cross or brass tablet rather than the ongoing cost of maintaining a hall, (although sometimes this justification was on aesthetic grounds). The clergy often supported the building of stone memorials, wanting the local focus of post war public mourning to be within their curtilage, to consolidate their place in increasingly uncertain village life. Although in the public meetings which took place nearly everywhere in 1919, the gentry or clergy could bully other villagers (for example at Prees) into accepting proposals for a stone cross, there was at least a debate and a sense of community response. **101**. In some villages this democratic tendency was extended to ballots on various options : ' At Bishop's Castle, the result of the ballot on the schemes was declared. The YMCA hut secured more than three times the number of votes cast for either of the other schemes . . meeting was of the opinion that a hall capable of seating 400 - 450 persons should be built '. Hanwood, too, had a ballot :
' Scouts have undertaken to distribute the circular and collect the voting slips on a referendum to decide between a village cross, a memorial hall and the endowment of a cottage.' **102**. Although at first it seemed that only larger settlements, and those not dominated by landlords, like Much Wenlock, would follow the trend to build community halls, a solution for smaller villages was on hand in the form of cheap war surplus army huts. At Rodington : ' When the young boys returned from the war, and with some money from a ' canteen fund ' for boys who had been in the forces, they decided they needed a village hall to meet, instead of just ' Clayton's Corner '. They bought an old army hut and put it on a piece of land given them by a local farmer. With the help of other young people of the village

they held whist drives and dances to finish paying for it and for the upkeep, taking it in turns to light the stove to heat the hall and generally keep it clean.' **103.**

In Edgton, in the south Shropshire hills, the army surplus hut was reassembled by ex - soldiers in their spare time, as an unofficial thanksgiving offering for their safe return. This village hall soon became the centre for a lively social scene, with dances and concert parties. At Edgton the land for the hall was given by a farmer, indicating that even such a ' co - operative ' process was dependent on the farmers and gentry and therefore tended to reinforce the conservative ' local patriotism '. One variation which took place at Leebotwood was a grant from the United Services Fund which was used as a commemorative endowment to the existing Men's Club. The same reinforcement of ' local patriotism ' and social conservatism appeared in Meole Brace where Mrs. E.W.Bather opened the Peace Memorial Hall having given the land for the building, but she too wanted it as ' an expression of the gratitude of the inhabitants for the conclusion of peace, and a point that is strongly emphasised is that the project is one in which the whole of the inhabitants have taken part without distinction of party or creed.' **104.**

By and large, the halls were run by committees on which the village elites were dominant. So in Lydbury North, the Village Hall trustees were Captain Plowden and Major Whittaker, two of the local gentry, plus two farmers and the vicar. However the main result of the campaign for village halls was to provide a focus and social centre for communities and the types of activity which took place in them tended to reinforce the dominant culture. **105.** Together with the introduction of rural bus services (usually with army surplus lorries), the spread of wireless ownership (the **Shrewsbury Chronicle** had a ' World of Wireless ' column from 1924) and the concert parties and the amateur theatricals (often with gentry participation) a mildly hedonistic culture was created, as a response to war and depression against which any alternative radical culture would look old fashioned and unappealing. This is not to say that halls were not used for socialist meetings, as they were in a widespread way during election campaigns, but that a site devoted to rural radicalism, like the Railwaymans' Hut at Craven Arms, was rare. **106**.

As was discussed in Chapter 5, the extent of popular support for the war in Shropshire may have been exaggerated. Even though a distinct working class patriotism developed, with W. H.Edwards as its prime proponent, there was a certain amount of ambivalence amongst all classes in rural society. This manifested itself in passive opposition to conscription, appeals to military tribunals, desertions and absenteeism. Farmers and their sons in particular, were widely criticised for avoiding military service and for profiteering. After the war, much of this was forgotten in a united drive to commemorate those who had been killed. In particular

Armistice Day became another newly created post war institution which reinforced Shropshire patriotism. At first the NFDDSS tried to organise a separate celebration of the working class blood sacrifice, but as has been discussed (p.131), the appealing lavish activities of the gentry backed Comrades of the Great War and national funding, had, by 1921, led to the creation of the British Legion and a united response to Armistice Day. **107.**

War Memorials were often paid for and opened by local landowners. From their unveiling, the war memorial ceremonies had a military flavour. That at Caynham near Ludlow was typical : ' At Caynham, Shropshire, the parade was headed by a banner, carried by ex-Private Tarbox, and a cross, born by ex - Private Turford. Two buglers, Privates Cadwallader and Povee sounded the last Post, as the committee treasurer handed the key to the Vicar, who then handed it to Major Mainwaring who ceremonially unlocked the Memorial Lytch Gate.' The names on the memorial tablet unveiled, again typically, were headed by the only officer, a figure from a local landowning family, followed by the agricultural workers (volunteers or conscripts) arranged alphabetically. Even the opening of nonconformist war memorials involved military ceremonies. At an unveiling at Trench Primitive Methodist Chapel - the last post was sounded by ex - Corporal Edwards of the King's Shropshire Light Infantry (KSLI). The unveiling of the NFDDSS' own memorial in Shrewsbury in 1920 (p.132) included the active involvement of the KSLI depot. **108.**

However, the working class radical response to the war loss was not entirely lost. The Shrewsbury May Day speeches took place at the Quarry, the site of the county war memorial, and anti war speeches were made like that given by Councillor Jim Simmons in 1923 : ' He spoke as one of the 1914 mugs, (laughter), who went out at the behest of capitalists and masters to fight from 1914 to 1918. His experience as a soldier had taught him that war and military force was no remedy for any of the loss from which the workers of the world were suffering.' **109.**

However this radical response was overshadowed by the success of ' local patriotism ' in dominating the celebration of sacrifice. Shropshire had devised a new commemoration to supplement the militarisation of remembrance - Bligny Day. On mobilisation, the existing county territorial regiment, 1/4th KSLI were sent to the Far East, where they remained on garrison duty until the summer of 1917. Their return to Europe and the Western Front was celebrated in the **Shropshire Chronicle**, which had witnessed the destruction of other Shropshire units - in particular, the 5, 6, 7th ' Kitchener ' battalions raised in 1914. **110.** The 1/4th retained its local identity in contrast to the Kitchener units which had been re - filled with conscripts drawn from all over the country. Its first major battle was at Bligny, which took place after the defeat of the nearly victorious German spring offensive of 1918. In relief,

British public opinion was jubilant and the myth of the Shropshire lads winning glory in a bayonet charge was reinforced by a unique award of the Croix de Guerre to the regiment by the French Republic. ' Bligny Day ' was later celebrated by the KSLI with a ceremony which involved the medal being pinned to the regimental colours and after the war the commemoration was extended to encompass ex - soldiers who served in all battalions of the regiment. The 4th KSLI was retained as a territorial battalion when other units suffered under the Geddes axe and by 1921 there were Bligny Day parades at Bridgnorth, Shrewsbury, Wellington and Oswestry. **111.** By celebrating a particular identity of Shropshire and its military prowess, the phenomenon had the effect of welding ex-servicemen to an establishment and military perspective at a time when returning soldiers, as we have seen, had the potential to be subversive. The carnage of the battlefield had caused a general anti - military movement in the post war period, which was even felt in patriotic Shropshire. For a time, local branches of the League of Nations union met even in rural areas. Despite Bligny Day the territorial army found it difficult to recruit up to strength and the very future of the Shropshire Yeomanry (see p.180) was briefly threatened. **112.**

However in most Shropshire villages, the military flavour and establishment control soon became secure as Armistice Day became part of the yearly calendar. One child's view of the ceremony will suffice : ' The Armistice Day parade was always very well attended at Baschurch. A parade was assembled outside the Boreatton Arms, consisting of ex - servicemen and women, Girl Guides and Ifton Heath Band. Mr Eric Dawson in a dark suit and bowler hat and medals, led the procession. A large banner was carried behind him. A service was held at the war memorial, reveille was sounded and the names of the fallen read. Then wreaths were laid.' In Shropshire, as nationally, the public commemoration of the war dead with military parade, wreaths and poppies, was absorbed comfortably into the prevailing cultural ethos of the county. By 1926 the Shrewsbury Remembrance Day parade included : ' customary military and ex-service detachments . . but non - official organisations were weakly represented.' **113.** However the end result of the potential for change brought about by the war, signified by this new national occasion and by the new village institutions was profoundly conservative.

Conclusion

F.E.Green in the second edition of his **Awakening of England** predicted that the ex - service farmworkers would choose radical solutions :

> Through the curtain of shell fire he may have seen a Vision - a Vision of himself and his comrades working in common to create and not to destroy. It is all the

> same to him whether it is Yorkshire or Wales, Cambridge or Shropshire. He wants to till the land in common with his fellows, and to keep the full fruits of his labour. The future depends largely upon the temper in which these young men return from the war....our soldier sons will no longer tolerate the land of England remaining in the hands of a privileged class, but will demand its restoration to the people, or they will feel that their sacrifices have been in vain.

Even Green recognised that ' With him (the returning soldier) there will be county associations as deep - rooted as that of the territorial magnate ', and in the end these ancient loyalties proved in Shropshire more powerful than class loyalties. **115.** We must regard the tenacity of paternalism and the ability of ' Shropshire patriotism ' to renew itself (even surviving the turbulent changes brought by the Great War) as the prime cause of the lack of impact of agricultural trades unionism in the county. The lack of appeal of the culture and practical benefits on offer from nonconformist, radical, trade union and socialist movements (all seen as too urban in their origins) was skilfully exploited by gentry and farmers, using new village institutions, to reinforce the powerful sense of locality felt by most Shropshire farmworkers. This was the most important explanation for the growth and distribution of agricultural trades unionism in Shropshire.

1. Stanley Baldwin Address to the Royal Society of St. George. 6th.May 1924. Published as **Our England and Other Addresses** (1926) p. 6. Quoted in Robert Colls and Philip Dodd (eds.) **Englishness, Politics and Culture 1880 - 1920.** (1986) pp.141 - 142. (Baldwin also encouraged the farmer image given to him by cartoonists).
2. Alun Howkins The Discovery of Rural England in Colls and Dodd op.cit. p.67.
3. Anthony Cohen **The Symbolic Construction of Community** (1985) p.118.
4. Quoted in Waite op.cit. p.15.
5. Raphael Samuel **British Dimensions : ' Four Nations History '** History Workshop Journal No.40 Autumn 1995 quoting P. Wormald **Offa's Dyke** in Campbell and others **The Anglo - Saxons** (1986) pp.120 - 121.
6. Linda Colley **Britons - forging the nation 1707 -1837** (1992) p.16, quoting The Gentleman's Magazine Vol.1 p.20.
7. Neil Evans **Introduction - Identity and Integration in the British Isles** in Evans (ed) Identity in the British Isles (1990) p. 9, Trevor Rowley **The Landscape of the Welsh Marches** (1986) Chapter 6, Richard Gough **A History of Myddle** (1981), and David Hackett Fischer **Albion's Seed - Four British Folkways in America** (1989) Part Two.
8. Interview with Bill Roberts of Norton (b. 1916) 17.7.95. As late as the 1970s when Susan Hale was conducting interviews in Wigmore on the Hereford/Shropshire border, she found :

' In common with ' border ' people all over the world, they had very strong loyalties. Children with flaming red hair and lilting voices and names like Ceridwyn Lewis and Ivor Morgan, said ' Oh no I'm not Welsh, Dad's Welsh - but I'm Hereford.' see Susan Hale **The Idle Hill : A Prospect for Young Workers in a Rural Area** (1971) p.23.

9. Quoted in Gladys Mary Coles **Mary Webb** (1990) p.134.

10. George Laurence Gomme **The Village Community** (1890) p.247 and Colin G.Pooley and John C.Doherty **The Longitudinal Study of Migration : Welsh Migration to English Towns in the 19th. century** in Colin G.Pooley and Ian D.Wyte **Migrants, Emigrants and Immigrants - A Social History** (1991) p.150.

11. John Osmond **The Modernisation of Wales** in Evans op.cit.p.150.

12. Shropshire Museums Service Oral History Collection (SMSOHC) No.48 Mr Edwards, farmworker of Worthen, No.95 Maurice Alderson (1894 - 1987), farmer and War Agriculture Committee officer 1914 - 18 war, of Bishop's Castle and John Norton (b. 1922), estate agent of Ludlow.

13. For details of the activists survey see p.101 and for the fascist connection see for example **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 14.12.23, 3.10.24, 27.8.26 and 17.2.28. I am grateful for the guidance of Martin Durham on this last point.

14. Interview with John Foster (b. 1920), farmer of Bridgnorth 17.7.95.

15. Quoted in Waite op.cit. p.139. See also Coles op.cit. p.42.

16. Ibid pp.151 and 157, see for example **Shropshire Chronicle** 10.8.23, under the headline ' Record Crowds of Pleasure Seekers. Invasion of Shropshire Hill Country ' and Gordon Dickens **An Illustrated Literary Guide to Shropshire** (1987) pp.77 - 78. An interesting sideline of this historical tourism was the passion for historical pageants in the interwar period : ' In 1934 a great event took place, Milton's Comus was to be re - enacted in the grounds of Ludlow Castle and among the 3,000 performers from the county, 29 came from our village, including ten children, among them my sister and me.' Shropshire WI **Shropshire Within Living Memory** (hereafter SWLM) (1992) p.227.

17. Quoted in R.K.Moore. **Memories of Clun - Edwardian Life in a Small Rural Town** (1986) p.85. Information Rose Sayers, Edgton.

18. Charlotte Burne **Shropshire Folklore** (1884). [The book was an important inspiration for Mary Webb - see Coles op.cit. p.42] Waite op.cit. p.29 and Christina Hole **A Dictionary of British Folk Customs** (1978) pp.78, 99,105, 267 and 281. For the twentieth century continuation of ' lifting ' see SWLM p.239. Dave Morris **The Roots of Welsh Border Morris** (1988) p.7. **Shropshire Chronicle** 10.6.27 reported an EFDSS demonstration and formation of a morris side at Market Drayton. See also SWLM p.121 and Gandy op.cit. p.36 for the survival of folk song.

19. Bob Bushaway **By Rite - Custom, Ceremony and Community in England 1700 - 1880** (1982) pp. 150 -152. Interestingly, the main battle at the Wrekin was between farmworkers

and coalminers - see Barrie Trinder **The Industrial Revolution in Shropshire** (1973) p.360. For a 20th century celebration of Oak Apple Day see SWLM p.244.

20. Hole op.cit. p.27. Arbor Tree Day still involves local schoolchildren re - enacting the squire's wedding.

21. Thompson op.cit. pp.124 and 342, and F.M.L.Thompson **English Landed Society in the 20th.Century** Transactions of the Royal Historical Society 40 1990 p.11. Howkins **Reshaping** pp.158 - 9, 225, 258 - 9, 277 and 289 and Newby op.cit. p.63.

22. Thompson op.cit. p.124 (Although the upheavals in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries may make this conclusion questionable), Mary Webb **Gone to Earth** (1917) p.45, SRO Lydbury North Parish Records CP 177/1/1/1 Parish Minute Book, and P 177/Q/2/1 Poor's Estate Charity Minute Book.

23.SMSOHC No. 74 John Norton (b.1922), estate agent of Ludlow.

24. Julian Critchley **The Fall of the House of Allcroft** Times Magazine 24.9.94 pp. 22 - 24. See also the same author's **A Bag of Boiled Sweets** (1994). The Allcrofts also sought to reinforce their historic roots by saving Stokesay Castle, ' the finest fortified manor house in England ' which they ' bought, repaired and opened to the public.' see Julian Munby **Stokesay Castle** (1993) p.15.

25. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 29.9.28, 30.1.20, and 10.10.26.

26. See for example Geoffrey T.Eddy **Thomas Lewis : Blue Ribbon Days** (1990) p.19 for a coming of age ceremony at Clungunford, **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 17.1.28 for Lord and Lady Brownlow's official visit to their Bridgewater estate, and Ibid. 25.1.29 for a servants ball at Sansaw Hall.

27. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 12.2.26 (Mr. Prince also performed for the WU's annual dinner ! see p.98).

28. See Chapter 3 pp.66 and 71. Interview with Bill Roberts (b.1920) farmworker of Norton 18.7.95 and SWLM p.22.

29. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 29.4.21 and 23.4.26. Barbara and Alan Palmer **Some Shropshire Gardens** (1990) p.49.

30. SRO CP 177 /1/1/1 Parish of Lydbury North Minute Books 1894 - 1936 (For the appointment of John Williams, labourer see 24.1.1900, P 177/Q/2/1 Poor's Estate Charity Minute Books 1916 - 1935, CP 177/9/10/1 Returning Officer's papers and CP 177/9/12/1 Ludlow Conservative Association Minute Book for the role of R.H.Newill.

31. SWLM p.43 and Mary Cholmondley **Under One Roof ; A Family Record** (1918) p.9. See for example the career of Rev. Cyril Lee, vicar of Worfield in **Captain John Foster** Horse and Hound March 1995 and Thompson op.cit p.144.

32. SMSOHC No.36 Maurice Alderson (1894 - 1987), farmer of Bishop's Castle and No.17 Gwen Wycherley, farmer's wife of Beckbury.

33. Interview with William Bright (b. 1909), Dorrington farmworker in **The Guardian** 25.7.95, Hollins op.cit. pp.20 and 217, Interviews with author 17.7.95 and 18.7.95.

34. VCH Vol.3 (1979) p.175., F.E.Green **The Tyranny of the Countryside** (1913) p.243.

35. See for example **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 12.3.15, and SRO 51/1A1/1 Shropshire War Agricultural Committee minutes 23.1.16. (For the unions' response see Green **English Agricultural Labourer** op.cit. p.138 - 139) Interview William Bright, **The Guardian** 25.7.95.

36. SMSOHC Nos.1.Oscar Morgan, farmer of Craven Arms, 36. Maurice Alderson (1894 - 1987), farmer of Bishop's Castle , 53. Robert Henderson (b. 1905) , farmer of East Wall , and 94. Percy Prince (b. 1907) farmer's son of Clunton. All the respondents who mentioned this were from south Shropshire. Five other farmers whose interviews are in this collection did not mention this form of training.

37. Howkins **Poor Labouring Men** op.cit. pp.20 and 217. For Shropshire see for example **Bucknell Talking** (1982) pp. 33 and 40 and **Wellington Journal** 10.3.23.

38. SMSOHC No.103 Bill Glaze, farmworker, Norton (b.1903).

39. SRO 51/1A1/1 Shropshire War Agricultural Committee Minute Book 20.1.17.

40. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 30.6.16, 4.2.21 and 1.10.20. For the same reaction of radical artisans towards the paternalism shown by Cambridge University colleges see the author's **Grads and Snobs : John Brown, Town and Gown in early 19thc. Cambridge.** History Workshop Journal No. 35 Spring 1993.

41. Critchley loc.cit.p.21. See also Mansfield loc.cit.p.189.

42. Gandy op.cit. pp.110 and 89.

43. Malcolm Wanklyn **Agriculture and Agrarian Society** (unpublished paper) p.11. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 19.12.19. This refers to the harvest strikes of 1919. For other examples of the intimidation of rural Labour Parties see Daniel Weinbren **Generating Socialism - Recollections of Life in the Labour Party** (1997) pp.24 - 25 and 196 - 197.

44. VCH Vol. 3 (1979) pp.255 and 271, Stamper op.cit. p.43 and VCH Vol.2 (1973) p.166.

45. Interview with John Foster (b. 1920) farmer, Bridgnorth, 17.7.95.

46. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 10.5.12.

47. **Kelly's Directory of Shropshire 1900** p. 14 and 1929 p. 6. **Kelly's Directory of Norfolk and Suffolk** 1922 p.3 and p.10. VCH. Vol. 2. (1973) p.188. Interview with John Foster (b. 1920), 17.7.95.

48. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 15.8.24, 14.12.28 and 21.12.28. For a pre - war critique of hunting from rural radical writer F.E.Green see his **Tyranny of the Countryside** (1913) Chapter VI. The current (July 1997) debate about the Wild Mammals (Hunting and Dogs) Bill and the mobilisation of support of ' the countryside ' against the ' interference ' of ignorant ' townees ' demonstrates the influence the fox hunts can still bring to bear and the longevity of ' local patriotism '.

49. Ibid 2.6.18 and Gladstone op.cit. p.138.

50. VCH Vol. 2 (1973) p.165, Eddy op.cit. p.13 and Lieut.- Col. D.C.Peddar **The Secret of Rural Depopulation** (1913) p.18. (Peddar was writing about Wiltshire in Fabian Society Tract No. 118)

51. VCH Vol. 2 (1973) p. 165 and SWLM p. 232. For a general discussion of these issues see John Benson **The Rise of Consumer Society in Britain 1880 - 1980** (1994).

52. Neave op.cit.p.1. For other discussions of friendly societies see Geoffrey Crossick **An Artisan Elite in Victorian Society** (1978), especially Chapter 9 and Eric Hopkins **Working Class Self Help** (1995). See also the SRO collections of friendly society material, the earliest being from the Bridgnorth Friendly Society (no number) and the Hawkstone Friendly Society, (745/1), see also Ivy Evans **Bishop's Castle and Lydbury North Female Friendly Society** Journal of the South West Shropshire Historical and Archaeological Society No.1 Spring 1989.

53. Neave op.cit. pp. 48 - 9, 68, 95 and 97.

54. See SRO collection and Evans loc.cit.

55. SRO 1927/1 24.5.08, 28.5.09, 24.6.10, 25.5.11, 22.5.12, 10.10.13, 21.5.15 and 18.6.15. Friendly society public activities were widely reported in the local press, see also Preshous op.cit. p.4.

56. Ibid. 24.5.08, 30.1.14, 31.5.13, 3.7.15 and 20.4.17. For Kilvert see also **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 22.11.18.

57. SRO 436/1/7204 Shropshire Provident Society Records (66 - 44 - 5), and SRO 1927/1 29.1.15.

58. SRO P177/C/1/4 Minutes of the Vestry Meeting St. Michael and All Saints Lydbury North 22.11.26. SRO 415/2 Membership Lists Wem Cow Club. It can also be speculated that the ' welfare ' role that NUAW organisers were expected to carry out for their members may reflect the protection that had been given by friendly societies. (see p.94)

59. SMSOHC No. 104 Mrs Bray (b.1900), Ackleton.

60. **New Leader** 20.4.23 and **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 7.11.24.

61. John Belchem **Class, Party and the Political System in Britain 1867 - 1914** (1990) p.16, VCH Vol.3 (1979) p.344., Wanklyn loc.cit. pp.15 - 16. Also see SRO 4531/3 for the discussion amoungst the Shropshire NFU about whether to promote a farmers candidate, rejected on 12.11.18 for ' unanimous support for Sir Beville Stanier ', landowner, proprietor of the **Shrewsbury Chronicle** and sitting Conservative M.P.

62. Webb op.cit. p.256.

63. Belchem op.cit. p.26 - 27, Howkins **Reshaping** pp.242 - 244 and Martin Pugh **The Tories and the People 1880 - 1935** (1985). Pugh p.24 suggests that the variations in Primrose League membership was due to deliberate inflation and the yearly figure was acheived by addition to a running total of all those who had joined since its inception.

64. SRO 552/114 Lydbury North Conservative Association Minute Book 1886 - 1924.

(Although some land in Edgton was owned by the Plowden estate, it was otherwise a classic upland ' open ' village with a Primitive Methodist chapel, see Waters op.cit.)

65. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 24.2.22, 15.12.22, 30.11.23, 14.12.23, 1.2.24, 17.10.24 and 31.10.24.

66. Ibid. 3.10.19, 15.4.21, 7.5.26, 14.5.26, 4.6.26 (Two engine drivers were summoned for intimidation to a blackleg, but dismissed through lack of evidence and an Oswestry collier was fined for obstruction in picketing) and D.J.Elliot **Policing Shropshire 1836 - 1967** (1984) pp. 164 -165.

67. John D. Gay **The Geography of Religion in England** (1971) p.151, E. J. Hobsbawm and George Rude **Captain Swing** (1969) pp. 288 - 90 and Nick Mansfield **The Ely and Littleport Riots** (Manchester University B.A. thesis 1973) p. 66.

68. Scotland op.cit. reviewed by A. J. Peacock in Society for the Study of Labour History **Bulletin** No. 44 Spring 1982, Obelkevich op.cit. p.275 and Howkins **Poor Labouring men** op.cit. Chapters 2, 3 and 5. Even in Nigel Scotland's most recent book **Agricultural Trades Unionism in Gloucestershire 1872 - 1950** (1991) there is an overemphasis on nonconformity, the only appendix, for example, is a list of NALU branch officials who were Methodists.

69. Gay op.cit. pp.87 and 106, Howard Burrows **Religious Provision and Practice in some mainly lowland rural Poor Law Districts of the lowland marches 1815 - 1914** (Wolverhampton University Ph.D. 1991) p.72, William E. Morris **The History of Methodism in Shrewsbury and District** (1961) p.17, Lawrence Gomer **The Buildings of Shropshire** Vol. III (1984) p.22 and Trinder **Industrial Revolution in Shropshire** op.cit. p. 285.

70. Morris op.cit. pp.19 and 52 and Burrows op.cit. p.107. Clee St. Margaret also had two Primitive Methodist chapels, see Simmonds op.cit. p.63. Royal Commission on the Historic Monuments of England **Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting - Houses ; Shropshire and Staffordshire** (1986). These have been plotted onto Map 6 for comparison with the distribution of trade union branches.

71. Ibid. For the ' open ' nature of the Shropshire ' chapel ' villages see Waters op.cit. and Gandy op.cit.

72. Burrows op.cit. p.283 - 4 and David Neave op.cit.p.47, who quotes Lord Wenlock of Escrick, East Yorkshire who refused to allow a chapel to be built on his estate, even though he provided a school, allotments and even a co-operative store.

73. Burrows op.cit. p.124. and **Eddowes Shropshire Journal** 13.3.72 and 27.3.72.

74. HRO K 76 / 10 14, quoted by Burrows op.cit. p.104.

75. John Beard **Early Struggles of the Union** Workers Union **Record** June and July 1919. Green op.cit. pp.143 - 144, relates a story from Beard's early campaign, where a chapel was only lent for a union meeting on condition that one of their trustees presided.

76. **Methodist Who's Who** (1933). See also a photograph of Francis' shop, with three employees in 1910 in Preshous op.cit. p.16. Letter to author from John Lenten 26.4.96. Patricia Edwards, the historian of Wem Methodism has also been unable to trace any connection between nonconformity and the unions, letter to author 23.5.96. Pretty op.cit p.172 and Howkins op.cit. pp.180 - 181.

77. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 25.1.29, 8.2.29, 10.5.29, 25.10.29, 8.5.14, 7.5.20, 24.6.24, 24.6.26, 15.5.22, 6.5.27, 28.12.23, 17.10.24, 24.10.24, 25.5.29, for the railwaymen's church parade see 14.9.17.

78. **Eddowe's Shropshire Journal** 13.3.72 and Malcolm Wanklyn **Border Agriculture and Agrarian Society** p.11. East Anglia had a tradition of ' red vicars', like the celebrated Conrad Noel of Thaxted (for whom see Saville and Bellamy op.cit. Vol. II p. 276 and Rev. George Bennet Chambers of Carbrooke, Norfolk, who was a great supporter of the NUAW, and had a hammer and sickle embroidered on his altar cloth. See also the activities of Canon J.R.Donaldson of St. Mark's Belgrave, Leicester in John Gorman **To Build Jerusalem** (1980) p. 76.

79. See for example the reporting of a speech by Tom Mann in Shrewsbury which lasted for two hours and ended with the singing of the Red Flag, **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 11.3.21., and reporting of the Easter Meets of the Clarion Cycling Club (See p.113)

80. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 22.6.23.

81. **The Labourer** January 1918 and H.Drinkwater **The Problem of Rural Constituencies** Labour Organiser October 1923.

82. Mervyn Jones **Michael Foot** (1994) p.45., and Interview with Michael Foot 17.9.92, **Labour Organiser** April/May 1923, **New Leader** 25.5.23. Chris Howard's article **' The Focus of the Mute Hopes of a Whole Class' : Ramsay MacDonald and Aberavon 1922 - 1929** Llafur Vol. 7 No.1 1996, indicates that poor Labour organisation due to lack of funds was not just confined to rural constituencies.

83. WU **Record** January 1921.

84. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 30.5.24 and 24.3.26.

85. SWLM p.231.

86. SWLM p.243.

87. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 30.5.24, SWLM pp.236 - 237, Preshous op.cit. pp.56 - 57. See also John Benson **The Working Class in Britain 1850 - 1939** (1989) p.199.

88. Howkins **Reshaping** pp.158 - 159 and 242. For a discussion of this issue in Shropshire see above footnote 61.

89. See SRO 4531/27 Shropshire NFU chart of membership and acreage for 1918, **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 23.1.20.

90. See footnote 61 above. For Fawcett see **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 15.12.22. He continued to be active in the Labour party and was briefly adopted as Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Hereford, Ibid 12.4.29. Ibid 29.11.18.

91. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 24.9.21 and SRO 4531/35 Shropshire branch Monthly Magazine.

92. Howkins **Reshaping** op.cit. p.79 and Mutch loc.cit. p.59.

93. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 28.10.27 and 4.11.27. The latter quote seems to suggest that the revival of ploughing matches encouraged inter - village rivalry, which, it is argued in Chapter 8, perpetuated NUAW and WU rivalry and dampened the level of agricultural trades unionism.

94. Ibid 5.10.28, 26.9.30 and 31.1.30.

95. Ibid 13.3.25 and 26.4.29.

96. Pamela Horn **Rural Life in England in the First World War** (1984) p.137 and Howkins **Reshaping** op.cit. p.278 - 279.

97. Maggie Morgan **Jam, Jerusalem and Feminism** Oral History Vol.23 No.1 Spring 1995 pp.85 and 87.

98. SRO P 177/G/4/1 - 1 Minute book Lydbury North WI 1931 - 1939.

99. Howkins **Reshaping** op.cit.p.278, Gandy op.cit. pp.134 - 135, Armstrong op.cit. p.249 and SWLM p.243. Morgan loc.cit. p.87 also found evidence of male opposition to W.I.s in Sussex in the inter - war period.

100. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 28.7.22 and 28.1.19.

101. For a fuller discussion of the rural war memorial movement see the author's **Class Conflict and Village War Memorials 1914 - 1924** Rural History 6 1 1995. For Prees see **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 31.1.19.

102. Mansfield loc.cit. pp.76 - 77.

103. SWLM p.37.

104. Information Dennis Waters, Edgton, SWLM p.228, **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 19.11.26 29.4.21 and 5.7.22.

105. SRO CP 177/16/1/1 Minute book Village Hall Trustees

106. For the impact of buses see SWLM p.184 - 185. These changes were recognised by the Labour party, see **The Changing Countryside** in Labour Organiser July 1926. For a Labour election meeting held at Edgton village hall see **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 26.4.29.

107. See for example **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 31.3.17, 2.6.16, 19.11.16, 25.8.16, 18.5.17, 17.11.16 and 6.9.18.

108. Mansfield loc.cit. pp.80 and 87.

109. Ibid p. 84. Simmons' career is mentioned in David Martin **Percy Sturmer** Saville and Bellamy op.cit. Vol.II (1974) p.341.

110. E.A.James **British Regiments 1914 - 18** (1978) p.92. There is a growing literature about the rural class relationships in the recruitment of volunteers for the Great War see

Nicholas Mansfield **Volunteers and Recruiting** in Gerald Gliddon (ed.) **Norfolk and Suffolk in the Great War** (1988), Keith Grieves **Lowther's Lambs : Rural Patriotism and Voluntary Recruitment in the First World War** Rural History 4, 1 (1993) and Mansfield loc.cit. **Village War Memorials**.

111. Major W.de B. Wood (ed) **The History of the KSLI in the Great War 1914 - 18** (1925) p.318 and **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 10.7.21.

112. See advertisements for the 4th. KSLI in **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 11.7.19, Gladstone op.cit. and Waters op.cit. Curiously, a fad for air guns swept rural youth in the early 1920s and air gun clubs were established with competitions against other villages continuing age old rivalries. It is interesting to speculate if these clubs had a militaristic purpose, see SWLM p.232.

113. Ibid.p.248 - 249, **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 19.11.26. For a discussion of these issues see Adrian Gregory **The Silence of Memory : Armistice Day 1919 - 1946** (1994). The military still plays a part in modern Shropshire life. Although the KSLI has been subsumed into the Light Infantry Regiment, its territorial successor has close links with the SAS whose home is in Hereford. This may be why, along with the idea that Shropshire is typical of ' county ' England, the IRA firebombed the KSLI Regimental Museum at Shrewsbury Castle in 1995.

114. Green op.cit. pp.337 - 338.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

This final chapter will summarise the aims, findings and implications of the thesis. It will first evaluate the impact of the rural unions in Shropshire in the light both of their progress in other counties and of their national profile. It will then review and evaluate possible expanations for the growth and distribution of agricultural trades unionism as outlined in Chapters 4 to 7. It will go on to assess the overall contribution the thesis makes to original knowledge by analysing its impact on a number of areas of academic debate and suggest how its findings might be used for future research.

Although, as Hobsbawm points out, Britain has the longest tradition of rural trades unions in the world, they have had a limited impact on the development of the agricultural industry. Indeed agricultural trades unionism has been compressed into a very short and recent timescale. Howkins imagines the events in **Poor Labouring Men** encompassing the lifetime of one farmworker whose life span is, not surprisingly, similar to that of George Edwards, the founder of the NUAW : ' Looking back from 1925 a long lived Norfolk ...farm labourer would have probably stressed the changes in his lifetime...Born in the late 1840s he would have spent a childhood in dire poverty, starting work at six years old in a gang pulling docks. He could have seen the gradual rise of the first union and the Liberal Party, and their collapse and betrayal. He might have then talked about the second union and labour.' **1.**

An equivalent imaginary Shropshire farmworker's life span would be even more compressed, and his brush with trade unionism even more transitory. Born in 1890, receiving a rudimentary education in the village school and coming to age in the supposed Edwardian ' golden age ', he would possibly be aware of trades unionism, but would more probably be a friendly society member. An army volunteer in 1914 or a conscript in 1916, he would have mixed with workers from other areas and if he returned safely, would be determined to make his war experiences meaningful. Often, this would include union membership, although the agricultural depression would rapidly dampen his expectations. Thereafter his options would have varied. He might become a labour movement activist, but if so, may have taken a job on the railways rather than undertake the thankless task of organising fellow farmworkers. He might take the more drastic step of migration, most likely to a city job, or possibly even overseas. Had he remained in his home village, he would most probably return to his countrymen's concerns, digging his garden or following the point - to - point. A member of the British Legion, by his retirement he would probably be a Conservative voter and would be at best indifferent to the impact trades unionism had made on his county.

Shropshire's significance within rural unionsm

The significance of the county within the overall development of agricultural trades unionism in Britain has proved to be stronger than was anticipated. Although work has been undertaken on agricultural trade unionism (particularly the NUAW) in other regions of Britain (see pp.6 - 10) there has been little systematic attempt to rank the importance of regions or counties within the unions. Even Mills' sociological work of the early 1960s claims merely to present a snapshot of the position at that time. However Mills, Newby and Howkins, in his substantial work on Norfolk, all present a picture of the large arable farmlands of Eastern England providing the bulk of union membership. Moreover Mills also suggests the importance of individual county efforts rather than crude economic determinism, by highlighting the historical significance of Dorset membership to the NUAW throughout the twentieth century. **2.**

The same county effort may also help to explain developments in Shropshire, which during the period 1913 - 1915, and possibly later, was one of the most important areas for the NUAW outside Norfolk. The county was also crucial to the WU. In part, the reason for this was the personal interest in the area held by the national leaders of both unions. Madden places Shropshire as the ninth most important county in the NUAW's 1915 strike campaign (out of around thirty counties where it was already organising), and a much later newspaper article suggests that it was the tenth largest by 1918. By the latter date certainly the NUAW and probably the WU, were organising in all thirty eight English counties and in most parts of Wales. **3.**

It is difficult to estimate Shropshire's national significance for either union in the post - war helter skelter of boom and bust, but it is likely to have been prominent given that the NUAW General Secretary was offered two opportunities to stand for Labour in parliamentary seats at Ludlow and Shrewsbury. It can also be safely concluded that the NUAW, with its more efficient county organisation, fared better than the WU. (Little is known nationally or locally of that minority of farmworkers who remained with the WU and later the TGWU). Even after the worst of the post - war depression, the unions in Shropshire were doing relatively well compared with other counties. The 1926 settlement was 32s. 6d for a 54 hour week, which was higher than in Herefordshire and compared well with Norfolk wages at 30s. per week, though was not as high as Lincolnshire where 35s. a week was paid. **4.**

Bill Glaze, a farmworker from Norton, provides evidence, convincing in its unsophisticated language, that the union only really developed in the years before 1939 :

> There was no unions then, not for a good while, well I think I were about 30, I think when the union started at the farm..Oh I was in it yes, in it for years then till I retired...although this union did help us a bit yer know but not a lot...We couldn't get no help, well not for a bit till it come these last few years then we started to get it see, well it would be about, well it would be in the 30s I expect, started yer know, building up a bit.

As late as 1958, the only other time when figures have been traced, the claim was that the county was the eighth most important in the NUAW : ' Shropshire was always to the fore in the organisation of rural wages ...the union in Shropshire was stronger now than it has ever been ' **5.**

Studied in a longer time scale, the achievements of agricultural trades unionism in Shropshire might appear more formidable. Arguably the creation of **any** continuous trade union organisation with such unpromising membership material was a triumph. So the 105 locations in which the NUAW was active, the 40 odd locations of WU branches and the thousands of individual farmworkers who must have passed through the ranks of the unions throughout the period represent a considerable achievement. There may also have been other unrecorded union activity. Additionally, the NUAW in particular was playing a longer game and its efforts were eventually vindicated by its successful post 1945 recruitment of other rural workers in sugar beet factories, egg packing stations and forestry plantations. This gave the union a firm base both locally and nationally. **6.** Shropshire never achieved its early promise, and never organised the same high percentage of farmworkers as the large arable counties in Eastern England. However it was always in the next tier of important counties. Considering that it shared many of the characteristics which made Wales such a disastrous area for union recruitment and had a culture which was antipathetic towards trades unions, its relatively modest achievements can be considered a considerable success.

Aims and findings

The aim of this thesis was to discover and trace the course of agricultural trades unionism in Shropshire during the first three decades of the twentieth century, and to identify and evaluate the key factors which might explain this development. These factors became the four areas into which source material began to be organised and which were to guide the study in its progress ; the local and national leaderships within farmworkers' unions, the impact of the wider rural labour movement, the structure of the Shropshire agrarian economy including the place of the farmworker, and the culture of rural Shropshire, Methodism and

' local patriotism '. These aims have been successfully fulfilled, it is believed, and the pattern of rural trades unionism in Shropshire has been uncovered and explained in a logical and credible way.

It was explained in Chapter 1 that, although the subject of this research is relatively recent, oral sources proved surprisingly difficult to obtain. So the experiences of the generation of farmworkers whose working lives fell either side of the Great War were indeed ' hidden from history ' even though they were within the personal knowledge of many older Shropshire people whose childhoods lay within this period. So when the author began research on the unions in Shropshire, first hand information was difficult to come by. Very few people knew or wanted to know about their history. The distaste for trades unions which helped create and sustain eighteen years of Conservative government from 1979 seemed to be compounded by a Shropshire view that ' nothing like that happened in our county '.

The lack of oral history sources on Shropshire farmworkers was dispiriting, especially as the author was probably ten years too late to interview farmworkers active in the unions in the key periods. However, persuaded by research in other counties that original material might exist, the other sources uncovered proved more than adequate for the task, and in the long term, surprisingly fruitful. Other primary non - oral material was indentified, particularly information relating to Shropshire within the national records of the farmworkers' unions and most significantly the undiscovered information waiting to be gleaned from the local press. In addition, the growing secondary sources on farmworkers have been complemented by material culled from military histories, folklore, memoirs, landscape and cultural studies. These sources, usually considered outside the sphere of trade union or labour history, have furnished further insights to reinforce the findings and analysis of the study.

It is believed that the findings have fulfilled the original aims of the study. It was argued in Chapter 2 that the growth of agricultural trades unionism in Shropshire broadly followed the pattern discernible by historians of other regions. This consisted of a modest start around 1912, with little membership remaining from the WU's campaign of 1899, a brisk growth in 1914, followed by a sharp downturn after the outbreak of war. Both unions grew from 1916 and this accelerated with demobilisation when branches were established throughout the county. The fall in agricultural prices from 1920 marked the contraction of the unions, with the WU sustaining a loss which was eventually terminal, whilst the NUAW proved more resilient.

It was argued in Chapter 3 that the WU's strength was in the eastern coalfield with fringe villages in Shrewsbury and in the larger villages to its west. The NUAW was roughly three

times as large and was spread in a fairly uniform way throughout the county. It also established pockets of particular strength in four areas ; the ' sandstone ' villages north of Shrewbury, villages south - east of Shrewsbury, the ' Ryelands ' and lower Severn Valley, and the south - west river valleys. However the WU and NUAW wastefully competed for members with rival branches in market towns and villages.

It is always difficult, of course, to establish a direct correlation between cause and effect. Nonetheless the evidence found in the course of this research would suggest that the major finding of the thesis is that ' local patriotism' provides the most potent explanation for the growth and distribution of agricultural trades unionism in Shropshire.

It was argued in Chapter 4 that the role of the national and local union leaderships was important in determining the growth and distribution of agricultural trade unionism. Particularly within the WU, the leaders' personal concern gave the union a remarkable boost in its growth within the county. The support given by the WU's industrial branches in the eastern coalfield and Black Country certainly influenced the distribution of farmworker branches which were within a few miles of this existing strength. Whilst this ' mixed branch ' tactic did provide some stability, without the cadre of village activists which the NUAW could draw on, the WU was unable to make a similar long term impact deep in the countryside. Its objective of organising farmworkers to prevent ' undercutting ' by rural immigrants of wages in the city seems also to have failed. The growth of the WU was based on full time organisers who, because they were paid by results, expanded the union geographically. It was easier for them to open branches in previously unorganised areas than to consolidate existing membership. As the agricultural depression took effect, the WU could not afford to service its recent members and growth rapidly dwindled. This process also exacerbated the long term rivalry with the NUAW as neither union would compromise and negotiate logical spheres of influence.

Although the ' necessary role of trade unions in ensuring harmonious wartime industrial relations ' favoured the WU leaderships until 1918, their corporatism did not transfer easily either to the favourable economic position which existed for farmworkers until 1920, or to the unfavourable economic position thereafter. **7.** Thus the rivalry displayed by national and local leaderships was intensified and this competition, by absorbing energy which could have been better deployed, depressed the overall level of agricultural trade unionism. This is not to conclude that the NUAW leaderships were blameless in promoting the rivalry. Although evidence is patchy, the enthusiasm demonstrated by local unions towards recruiting women workers was decidedly limited. There is no evidence, however, that had this course been pursued, the development of Shropshire unions would have been different in any significant

way. There was a decided move towards amalgamation in the late 1920s, but in the end the cautious Norfolk - dominated NUAW EC decided not to seize the moment (see pp. 86 - 87). There is also evidence, though not from Shropshire, that local leaderships regarded this as a missed opportunity. Bill Curtis of Salhouse, Norfolk, a NUAW activist who joined the TGWU in 1930, reflected on the eventual amalgamation in 1981 :

> I'm glad I did [join the TGWU]. The wages were better and they looked after you better in the Transport and General Workers, they're the biggest union in England. They are today. They should have been in it years ago, they would have been better off than what they are today. A lot of the old 'uns said no they'd a been better off on their own but what was the good. They hadn't no money they couldn't do anything . They were more or less bankrupt when they went to the Transport. **8.**

It was the efforts of local activists which probably largely influenced the geographical distribution, if not the number, of branches, particularly within the NUAW. It can be concluded then that the course of agricultural trades unionism was influenced by national and local leaderships.

It was argued in Chapter 5 that the wider Shropshire labour movement had little influence on the growth and distribution of agricultural trade unionism in the county. Although a trade union and socialist movement had developed in the county town by 1914, there is scarcely any evidence of links with farmworkers. In the industrial areas of the county like Oswestry and the Clee Hills, the local labour movement was inherently weak and had few resources to offer agricultural workers. Even in the Ironbridge Gorge area the early decline of industry caused weak trades unionism and aside from the WU's ' mixed branches ', there is little to suggest that it influenced rural trades unionism or even had any impact on wage levels in its hinterland.

The co - operative movement mainly developed in the country towns of Shropshire, and with some exceptions (see p.124) its impact on farmworkers was limited. Even in those villages in which a political ' rural radicalism ' evolved, there does not seem to have been a comparable consumer co - operative movement. A class consciousness on the part of farmworkers and their families was evident by the end of the Great War even in remote areas of the county. Mary Elizabeth Hamer of Hopesay demonstrated this in a letter responding to the official attempt to encourage women back onto the land :

> I have done my own garden, and I am prepared to help on any farm in the neighbourhood at an honest wage, but not for wages that would not pay for the

clothes I wore out at work . . . When they had men working, they treated them like dogs, and would not pay a living wage to keep a family on. I speak from experience for my husband was a waggoner at 14 shillings a week and five children and myself . . .What about the farmers wives and daughters? The one half of them are brought up to do nothing besides play the piano and dance the carpets. Put them to make a loaf of bread. Can they do it? And as for milking a cow, or feeding a pig or any other animal, they can't soil their hands. A very insulted wife of a soldier. **9.**

After the war demobilisation created new opportunities for the wider labour movement to build on such views : ' There was a brief euphoria in 1919 and 1920 when to trade unions and other working class organisations it seemed that they could indeed look forward to building the promised land . . .A time of noble aspirations, rich in hope after the Armistice of 11 November 1918.' **10.** This was parallelled by the spectacular growth of radical ex - service organisations. Although the WU put great effort into controlling this movement, in the longer term this proved to be diverted and wasted energy, although a certain amount of the ex - service enthusiasm went into the NUAW / Labour Party rural radicalism in the sandstone villages and elsewhere.

Apart from these villages, the rural Labour Party was very weak in Shropshire and far from aiding agricultural trades unionism, it was organised farmworkers who created what socialist presence existed. To sum up, the wider labour movement does little to explain the development of rural unions. The most influential part of the wider labour movement in the development of agricultural trade unions was the organised railwaymen. The NUR's fraternal relationship with the NUAW was important at national, county and branch levels. Its influence was felt both during the period of break - neck expansion at the end of the war when the correlation between railway halts and local farmworkers' branches was probably high, and during the lean post 1921 years when the mutually supportive relationship was a major cause of the survival of the NUAW.

It was argued in Chapter 6 that explanations of agricultural trades unionism centring on the structure of the agrarian economy and the social and economic factors deriving from it, do initially seem to be of major importance. The overall trend in British agriculture in the twentieth century towards mechanisation and a smaller workforce clearly discouraged trades unionism and political activism. In the words of one activist : ' You take a lot of farms where there was forty men there's only four now. There used to be six teams of horses, there's not a horse on there now, just a cab and a tractor driver and that's the lot, that's what

happened.' **11.** In Shropshire this trend was compounded by the pastoralisation of farming, which although its expansion had peaked before 1900, continued gradually throughout our period, decreasing the number of workers per holding and thereby discouraging trades unionism. The county's agriculture was influenced, at all levels, by its remoteness from the rest of the United Kingdom and by its physical geography, which made communication difficult both internally and externally. These factors again discouraged trades unionism and increased the importance of those good communication links which did exist, particularly the north - south railway lines, which made the supporting role of the railway unions so crucial.

Despite the pastoral trend, its varied physical geography made Shropshire agriculture complex. The attempt in this study to relate types of farming to the strength of agricultural trades unionism in each locality has, with a few exceptions, proved inconclusive. Precise evidence is lacking to establish a direct causal relationship between agricultural regimes in each Shropshire ' pays ' and the relative impact of rural unions on the workforce of that district. In other spheres we can be even more certain that factors are inconclusive in explaining union development. Demographic changes show little difference between villages with unions and those without them. The declining industrial areas of Shropshire did not influence either agricultural wages or union growth and distribution in their rural hinterlands. Smallholdings were insignificant in terms of overall agricultural output and aside from perhaps encouraging a cultural conservatism amongst certain of the rural poor, were irrelevant to local union development.

Again, it is impossible to establish a causal relationship between the survival of landed estates and trades unionsm in their locality. However, the social circumstances of the gentry are of great relevance. In Shropshire they survived better than in other parts of the country and their social and economic relationships with their tenant farmers were more cordial. This led to a united front against trades unionism and the encouragement amongst their employees of differentials in wages and status, of pride in workmanship and other strategies which by - passed and made irrelevant the incipient minimum wage system. So in 1922 a metropolitan interventionist view was that : ' The conciliation boards must be preserved and stiffened. The unions must be saved or in the present state of panic into which the farmers are getting, the labourer will be forced to the wall '. But on the Shropshire borders the farmers, whilst decreasing their workforces, took care of their key personnel : ' If a man would work for a minimum wage he wasn't worth having '. **12.** This by - passing of the AWB system, by preventing the unions from delivering tangible benefits to their members, deterred all but the keenest of activists. So, whilst the physical/geographical aspects of the Shropshire rural economy are inconclusive in their impact upon agricultural trades unionism, the social

consequences of this economic activity do provide plausible accounts and were then explored in some depth.

It was argued in Chapter 7 that cultural factors, and in particular the continuing and increasing importance of ' local patriotism ', are the most significant explanation of the growth and distribution of agricultural trades unionism. Shropshire had a strong county identity which was defined in part in relation to Wales and the industrial midlands, which seems stronger than in most of rural England. Even within this ancient loyalty the sense of place to most Salopians who worked on the land was further defined in terms of a ' pays ' or even a village. This was recognised by some labour leaders as a potential hazard to union development. At the conference called by the TUC in 1918 to discuss the differences between the NUAW and WU, George Edwards felt that the potential friction between the two unions was increased by this inter - village rivalry : ' We are convinced of the importance of this phase of the question because of the fact that in the past the feeling between village and village in many districts has been very strong, and whereby the presence of two unions would accentuate it.' **13.** These age - old, almost ' tribal ' differences, which seem particularly strong in Shropshire, may well explain the peculiar distribution of some village branches which were almost entirely surrounded by those of the rival union. The historian may be looking for another explanation, when inter - village rivalry is the answer. Paternalism as practised by gentry, clergy and farmers was real, and was reinforced using sport and leisure, local government, charities and friendly societies. Shropshire nonconformity was weak compared with the dominant mild Anglicanism and neither it nor developing radicalism nor socialism had sufficient advantages to offset the benefits to the farmworker of co - operation with the gentry or farmers.

Higher aspirations were certainly in evidence. As Billy Fielding wrote to F.E.Green in 1919 : ' The farm worker is not the docile creature he was twenty years ago. More intelligent, he has more initiative, greater capacity, and desires a higher standard of comfort - better houses, more furniture, musical instruments, a good class of literature...how many embryo Miltons and Shakespeares have human society pounded back to the earth again : their latent genius and talent buried without opportunities of development ! ' **14.** These aspirations were particularly evident in the wake of the First World War : ' Tempered by the fires of battle, moulded in the comradeship of the trenches, witnesses of the strength of united action, they were in no mood to return to the respectful, cap - in - hand approach to employers of the past.' and ' our soldier sons will no longer tolerate the land of England remaining in the hands of a small privileged class but will demand its restoration to the people or feel that their sacrifices have been made in vain.' **15.** However, this heroic wave of agricultural trades unionism broke against the rock of severe agricultural depression. By 1923 perhaps only the

1,400 Labour voters in the 1923 bye - election would probably disagree with the comments made by the victor the Hon. Robert Clive : ' Ludlow has emphatically shown that it does not want to have anything to do with socialism.' **16.**

The county establishment was also capable of using intimidation to oppose any dissent. Even in 1919 when the tide was running in favour of the unions, Fielding found : ' We are regarded by the farmers mostly as firebrands who are bent on stirring up discontent where previously nothing but content existed. Even by the most business - like farmers we are regarded as a beastly nuisance and one that has to be tolerated.' Retrospectively, other activists considered ' Being a union member in those days required a good deal of courage and a lot of fortitude ' and ' To be a branch officer was almost heroic, for victimisation was considerable.' **17.** Even a generation later, after the 1945 election, Labour voters in Gnosall, one of the areas of ' rural radicalism ' identified in this study, were victims of political victimisation :

> There were the landed of Shrewsbury...about five or six large estates, and most of the people living in the villages worked on the estates and had tied houses... I suspect they'd had letters from their sons who were serving miles away who said, whatever you do don't vote for Churchill...And these people would put up posters in their window. When the election was over and Stephen had became the Member of Parliament several, perhaps half a dozen of them , not only lost their jobs but lost their houses and we could do nothing to help. **18.**

Shropshire's remoteness and its distance from socialist ideological support compounded the problem of how trades unionism was perceived, which in any case could be branded by squire, farmer and farmworker alike as foreign and ' townee '. Although no direct evidence exists for the county, it is possible that Newby's findings of the 1970s in Suffolk, that 92% of his informants felt that they had more in common with farmers than with workers in other industries, could easily be transposed to Shropshire. **19.**

After 1918, gentry and farmers skilfully exploited the possibilities offered by new village institutions - ploughing matches, Women's Institutes, village halls and above all, those connected with the commemoration of the war, to reinforce paternalism, to discourage radical political action and to cement a very real sense of local Shropshire patriotism. Briefly the WU, through its moderate political stance and particularly through its championing of ex - servicemen, tried to become part of this ' local patriotism ', but now unwanted by its new found friends in the farming establishment and outmanoeuvered by the political astuteness of the county status quo, this tactic proved a failure.

One informant in the Women's Institutes' oral history demonstrates the extent to which Shropshire patriotism made farmworkers hostile to agricultural trades unionism, which in reality was relatively powerless : ' When Bert had his 14th birthday, the farmer was informed by the labour union that he should pay Bert three shillings and sixpence per week and that this would be increased every year. The farmer told Bert that he could not afford to pay such high wages, and he must give him the sack! So ended Bert's first job. Such was life in those days.' **20.**

The lack of serious challenge from any alternative ideological system, either nonconformity or socialism, and the adaptability of ' Shropshire patriotism ' both to carry on old traditions and adopt change after the Great War, made it especially potent. It was this which was the major explanation for the apparent overall lack of impact of Shropshire agricultural trades unionism between 1900 and 1930.

In weighing the relative importance of the factors influencing agricultural trades unionism, it must be concluded that while national and local leaderships were moderately important, the wider labour movement (aside from the NUR) was of little significance. Whilst the economic aspects of the structure of agrarian society have proved inconclusive in their impact, the social elements were very important in their effect on the development of agricultural trades unionism. Above all, these cultural factors centring on a conservative ideology, the survival of paternalism and the tenacity of a local patriotism, were the main determinants of the course of the unions in the Shropshire countryside. It was these, more than anything else, which thwarted F. E. Green's cherished vision of rural radicalism : ' It will surely bring the light of Dawn to the eyes of those who for so long have lived without fellowship in our lonely countryside.' **21.** The conclusion of this thesis, ironically, is that such a fellowship was indeed created, based not on socialism, but on ' Shropshire patriotism '.

Implications

It is believed that the thesis makes a significant contribution to the history of Shropshire during the early part of the twentieth century which to date has not received any significant attention. Most studies of Shropshire have been concerned with the medieval or early modern periods, or with the industrialisation of the Ironbridge Gorge. Neglect of its more recent past carries the implication that nothing of importance has happened since as the county was thereafter by - passed by national events. ' Surely not another trades union history ' might be the reaction of a prospective reader. Yet as will be demonstrated, a rich

and varied range of sources in the preparation of this thesis has resulted in a work which, it is hoped, will make a useful contribution to a wide group of historians and offer new avenues for future work.

The contribution of the thesis to the more obvious areas of research will be considered under the four headings which have guided the whole study. By taking as its subject an under - unionised industry in an under - unionised county, the thesis is breaking new ground. When examining local and national leaderships, it discusses whether traditional explanations for the success of trades unionism can be ' inverted ' to see if they are also applicable in situations where unions were relatively unsuccessful. Most union histories look at the origins, rather than the mature development, of their subject, which tends to give them a nineteenth - century rather than a twentieth - century bias. This study is important because of the rise and relative decline of the subject within a compressed time scale. It is also unusual in frankly considering the conflict between two unions - indeed it finds that Shropshire was the centre of a national conflict which was decidedly detrimental to both unions. These findings would benefit from comparative work in other areas of the country.

The study continues the trend of the best of more recent institutional labour histories which have broken away from the traditional accounts which consider the unions in isolation. A particularly good example of this trend is Francis and Smith's **The Fed** which is consciously a social and cultural history of a trade union ; ' The union in its society ' as it is described by its authors in their introductory chapter. This trend has also been followed by Howkins in his work on Norfolk, where the unions are seen as the product not simply of exploitation and poverty but as a logical outcome of the ' structural conflict ' in farming and the farmworkers' ability to mobilise using the chapels, friendly societies and other elements in rural society. **22.**

Whilst the present study is a deliberate addition to the growing literature on farmworkers and their trades unions in Britain, the author's own dissatisfaction with many of these has led him to take the two works cited above as a model. In addition, given the relative weakness of Shropshire unions compared, for example, with the South Wales Miners' Federation or even the NUAW in Norfolk, the author has attempted to follow the interaction of farmworkers with the other groups which made up rural society. Certainly the study has confirmed many of the contours located by Howkins and others which find a close correlation between national agricultural trends and rural trades unionism in each locality on issues like wages.

Although there were no existing accounts of the trades unionism or labour history in Shropshire to provide a background for this thesis, it has been demonstrated that sources do

exist to fill the gap. Although some existing accounts of farmworkers have made reference to parts of the wider rural labour movement, this thesis is the first which has attempted to evaluate fully the contribution made to agricultural trades unionism by other groups of workers. The author has traced the growth of organised railwaymen in the county and related this to the development of farmworkers' unions. Other authors have only touched on this relationship and the present study provides an example which may serve for similar research in other rural areas in England. The narrative of the Labour Party in Shropshire, whilst more sketchy, could also serve as a tool for a long overdue general account of socialism in the twentieth - century countryside. A major contribution of the study has been to emphasise the important role of the radical ex - service organisations in the period 1917 to 1920. Although their goals were often confused and the lack of sources about these largely forgotten movements is formidable, there is scope for a national history of their political and cultural aspirations for which this thesis would provide a useful starting point.

No such claims are made for the study's discussion of the impact of the co - operative movement on the development of farmworkers' unions. However, the Shrewsbury Society was relatively important. Linked to this, a study of the growth of the Shrewsbury labour movement in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the the unusual location of a county town would be relatively easy and would make an interesting contribution to the history of trades unionism and to the development of working - class political history. Although the thesis has attempted to study the interaction between the rural and urban labour movements within the county, it has been restricted by the lack of information. Although challenging in terms of sources, a study of the labour movement in the eastern coalfield (which produced such leaders as mineworkers Albert Stanley and Alfred Onions in the nineteenth century and Len Murray in the twentieth century) could offer an insight into trades unionism in a declining industrial area. The Shropshire Miners' Association, whose appearance in the sources for this thesis was curiously opaque, would surely benefit from a major local study. In addition the north - west corner of the county with its coalfield, railways and engineering works produced a trades union movement which in conjunction with the under - researched Chirk coalfield provides a future opportunity for a Welsh labour historian. **23.**

The author makes no great claims as to the originality of those explanations for agricultural trades unionism based on the structure of the agrarian economy. Many of the economic and social factors investigated, for example demography and the relationship between unions and the estates, have been inconclusive, though perhaps not insignificant. Nor has it been possible to relate variations in types of farming to union strength, nor to add significantly to Brown's work on the factors which made for a strong union branch. However, the work has confirmed the importance to farmworkers of concerns like wage differentials and pride in

workmanship and has related them to agricultural trades unionism in an original way. It is hoped that this account of the early twentieth - century agrarian economy could lead to further study of Shropshire in the later decades, looking at agricultural mechanisation, the decline of the eastern coalfield, Telford new town and the rise of light industry in the county. All this would be helped by the coverage of economic and social developments in Shropshire and particularly their relationship to employment and the wider labour market, which is given in this thesis.

In its discussion of the cultural explanations for agricultural trades unionism, this study contributes to existing debates and breaks new ground. Shropshire evidence gives a very clear picture of the unimportance of nonconformity, even compared to Anglicanism, in the development of twentieth - century agricultural trades unionism, which is in direct contradiction of its centrality in explanations offered by other authorities. The author has concluded that the most significant factor shaping the growth and distribution of Shropshire agricultural trades unionism was a conservative ideological hegemony based on ' local patriotism '. The inherent strength of this phenomenon enabled it to out - perform any alternative socialist challenge. Solidly grounded in ancient loyalties, a sense of place and surviving paternalism, ' local patriotism ' was dynamic enough to use existing rural structures and new village institutions to face post war demands for change and maintain its cultural supremacy. This finding opens up new areas for research in twentieth century rural history and indicates a need for local and national studies of those under - researched village institutions described in Chapter 7. It also raises the possibility of a debate about the relative success of rural elites in other parts of the country in maintaining their privileged position into very recent times. This will relate additionally to the notion of the superiority of rural society which still tantalises the British psyche as the twenty first century approaches.

1. For a review of rural radicalism in world terms see E.J.Hobsbawm **The Age of Empire 1875 - 1914** (1987) p.37. For the role of farmworkers generally in the development of agriculture, see the many works of George Ewart Evans in the bibliography. Howkins **Poor Labouring Men** op.cit. p.14.

2. Pretty op.cit. on Wales and Scotland op.cit. on Gloucestershire offer no discussion on this issue and Brown op.cit. on Essex although more analytic, finishes at 1914. Mills op.cit. p.21 and Newby op.cit. p.255.

3. Madden op.cit. p.49. This author was seemingly unaware of the Shropshire strikes of 1916 and 1917, so he may be underestimating the importance of the county.

4. For the offer to R.B.Walker to stand at Shrewsbury during the 1924 General Election see NUAW Records EC Minutes 20.8.24 and for Ludlow see above pp.117 - 118. Labour Party **Annual Conference Report** 1925 p.369. See also Groves op.cit. p.252 - 253 where Shropshire wages are shown to compare well with those of neighbouring counties in 1924 and 1938.

5. SMSOHC No.103 Bill Glaze (b.1906) farmworker of Norton.

6. See Wynn op.cit. The same sort of argument is used of other unions. The Musicians' Union still measures its success by its ability to stave off the current wave of technical innovation until the older generation of membership retires and the younger one adapts to the change. Interview with Dennis Scard, General Secretary 17.7.93. See also Mike Jempson **The Musicians' Union 1893 - 1993** (1993) pp.38 and 42.

7. B.A.Waites **The Effect of the First World War on Class and Status in England** Journal of Contemporary History Vol.II No.1 1976 p.27.

8. Interview with author 1982, tape at Norfolk Rural Life Museum. The rivalry between the NUAW and TGWU was felt in post - war amalgamation attempts and was still an issue in the final negotations in 1981, see Scales op.cit. and Wynn op.cit.

9. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 22.10.15.

10. Sir William Richardson **A Union of Many Trades : The History of USDAW** (1979) p.76.

11. George Howell of Walsingham, Norfolk, interview with author 1982, tape at Norfolk Rural Life Museum.

12. These views are from Sir Sydney Oliver (ex - civil servant and Fabian, who was Secretary for India in the 1924 government) in **Unemployment in Rural Districts** Labour Magazine March 1922 p.420 and SMSOHC No.39 Maurice Alderson (1894 - 1987), farmer of Bishop's Castle.

13. TUC **Annual Report** 1918 p.24. There is very little literature on inter - village rivalry, although some mention is made in the works of George Ewart Evans (see bibliography) and more particularly, also in East Anglia, by Rowland Parker **The Common Stream** (1972).

14. Green **English Agricultural Labourer** op.cit. p.277.

15. Spoor op.cit. p.72 and Green **Awakening** op.cit. p.338.

16. **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 27.4.23.

17. Green **English Agricultural Labourer** op.cit. p.277 and **Shrewsbury Chronicle** 21.3.58. (These two activists are quoted but not named in the piece)

18. Anne Swingler (b.1915) a Labour activist from nearby Stafford, quoted in Daniel Weinbren **Generating Socialism : Recollections of Life in the Labour Party** (1997) p.196. Gnosall, although in Staffordshire, was similar to the neighbouring Shropshire villages where the NUAW was strong. See also other interviews with rural Labour Party activists in

the same work pp.24 - 25 and 178 - 179. The author has personal experience of a farmworker being told to take down a Labour poster from his tied cottage as late as the bye - election in the Isle of Ely in July 1973.

19. Newby op.cit. p.378. He also found (p.358) that there were four times as many farmworkers who were Conservative Party members as there were farmworkers who were Labour Party members.

20. SWLM. p.158. The informant is unknown, but appears to be a woman talking about her father.

21. Green **Awakening** op.cit. p.352.

22. Hywel Francis and David Smith **' The Fed ' : A History of the South Wales Miners in the Twentieth Century** (1980) and Howkins **Poor Labouring Men** op.cit. For a similar approach conceming an ethnic immigrant group, rather than a trade union see William D.Jones **Wales in America : Scranton and the Welsh 1860 - 1920** (1993).

23. For Stanley and Onions see Trinder op.cit. p.398. Murray, Dawley born general secretary of the TUC, lacks a biography, but Jack Jones **Union Man : An Autobiography** (1986), details his role in the Social Contract of the mid - 1970s. Arthur Latham, long serving secretary of the Shropshire Miners' Assocation, was another key labour movement figure from the eastern Shropshire coalfield. Sally Venn's M.A. thesis on the North Wales Miners Assocation provides a starting point for work on the geologically linked coalfield between Wrexham and Oswestry. The cultural history of this area could also be explored by investigating the remarkable number of professional association footballers originating from it, and the interesting contrast with the well researched popularity of rugby football in South Wales. The most important individual was Billy Meredith, miner, Welsh international and founder of the Players' Union, for whom see John Harding **For the Good of the Game : The Official History of the Professional Footballers' Assocation** (1991).

List of Photographs

Photograph 1 The Red Lion, Bomere Heath, whose Assembly Rooms were the scene of union meetings in 1872 and 1914.

Photograph 2 John Beard, President of the WU.

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Photograph 4 Charles Duncan, General Secretary of the WU.

Photograph 5 George Edwards (centre), founder of the NUAW, with two other veterans of Arch's union, at the Burston Strike School, Norfolk, 1917.

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Photograph 13 County war memorial, St. Mary's churchyard, Shrewsbury. Unveiled by the NFDDSS in 1920.

Photograph 14 Mark Scott, WU organiser, during the Wrekin Bye - election of 1920.

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